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32

THE BONHEUR DES DAMES;

OR,

THE SHOP GIRLS OF PARIS.

BY ÉMILE ZOLA.

AUTHOR OF "NANA," "L'ASSOMMOIR," "CLAUDE'S CONFESSION," "HELENE,"
"POT-BOUILLE," "THERESE RAQUIN," "THE MYSTERIES OF MARSEILLES,"
"THE GIRL IN SCARLET," "MAGDALEN FRAT," "ALBINE,"
"THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LOUIS NAPOLEON,"
"LA BELLE LISA; OR, THE PARIS MARKET GIRLS,"
"A MAD LOVE," "IN THE WHIRLPOOL," ETC.

TRANSLATED BY JOHN STIRLING.

"THE BONHEUR DES DAMES; OR, THE SHOP GIRLS OF PARIS," is the striking title of Émile Zola's latest contribution to French fiction. It is amazingly clever and interesting, and will certainly take a front rank among the master romances of this or any other age. Zola has never given the world anything like it, and its entire novelty in subject, scope and style vastly augments its undeniable charm. The heroine is a young shop girl in a huge Paris dry-goods store, the "Bonheur des Dames," and her varied experience is the pivot upon which the entire fascinating narrative turns. Contrary to Zola's usual method of procedure, he paints her as a model of innocence and purity. Of course, she has her temptations, and fearful ones they are, too, but her natural inclinations and thorough goodness enable her to pass through them as spotless as the driven snow. She receives her reward at last in happiness, wealth and social position. The action of the great novel takes place mainly in the immense store, the rise of which from the smallest proportions Zola describes with the utmost minuteness. The hosts of shop girls and salesmen are all brought in and placed before the reader in Zola's most naturalistic way. In fact, shop girl life has never before been so completely and effectively exposed to the public gaze. There are some vivid descriptions of Paris in sunshine and storm, by day and by night, and all the incidents tell. The plot is powerful and absorbing in the highest degree, while every character is life-like.

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LIST OF ÉMILE ZOLA'S GREAT REALISTIC WORKS.

Translated from the French by John Stirling.

The Bonheur des Dames; or, The Shop Girls of Paris. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "Pot-Bouille," etc. With Illustrated Cover.

Nana. The Sequel to "L'Assommoir." By *Emile Zola*, author of "Pot-Bouille," "L'Assommoir," etc. With a portrait of "Nana" on the cover.

L'Assommoir. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "Pot-Bouille," "Albine," "Helene," etc. With a portrait of "Gervaise," the mother of "Nana," on the cover.

Pot-Bouille. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Helene," "A Mad Love," "The Girl in Scarlet," "La Belle Lisa," etc. With an Illustrated Cover.

The Mysteries of the Court of Louis Napoleon. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Pot-Bouille," "Helene," "A Mad Love," etc.

In the Whirlpool. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Helene," "A Mad Love," "The Girl in Scarlet," etc. With an Illustrated Cover.

Claude's Confession. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Pot-Bouille," "The Girl in Scarlet," "La Belle Lisa," "Helene," "A Mad Love," etc.

The Girl in Scarlet; or, The Loves of Silvere and Miette. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Pot-Bouille," "Albine," etc.

The Mysteries of Marseilles. By *Emile Zola*, author of "L'Assommoir," "Nana," "Pot-Bouille," "The Girl in Scarlet," "La Belle Lisa," "Helene," etc.

Albine; or, The Abbe's Temptation. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "The Girl in Scarlet," etc. With a portrait of "Albine" on cover.

A Mad Love; or, The Abbe and His Court. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Pot-Bouille," "The Girl in Scarlet," "Helene," etc.

Helene. A Tale of Love and Passion. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "Pot-Bouille," "The Girl in Scarlet," etc. With a portrait of "Helene" on the cover.

La Belle Lisa; or, The Paris Market Girls. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Pot-Bouille," "The Girl in Scarlet," "Albine," etc.

Magdalen Ferat. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Pot-Bouille," "The Girl in Scarlet," "La Belle Lisa," "Helene," "Albine," etc.

Therese Raquin. A Novel. By *Emile Zola*, author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Pot-Bouille," "The Girl in Scarlet," "La Belle Lisa," "Helene," "Albine," etc.

Nana's Daughter. Sequel to "Zola's Nana." **Nana's Daughter.** With an Illustrated Cover with Portraits of the Heroines in the work.

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

“THE BONHEUR DES DAMES; OR, THE SHOP-GIRLS OF PARIS,” Emile Zola’s latest and most extraordinary novel, now being so greedily devoured throughout Europe and occasioning such a flood of comment, is herewith reproduced in English for the first time. While views may differ in regard to it in this country, no critic will be hardy enough to deny that the romance possesses remarkable merit and interest of an unusually absorbing description. Its main theme is shop-girl life, which seems to be much the same in Paris as here, to be surrounded with the same temptations and to tend to the same objective point. Zola, as is the custom with him, takes up the evils of shop-girl life and thoroughly exposes them in order that they may be destroyed. He does not gloat over these evils, does not surround them with alluring glitter, does not conceal or cloak their enormity, but with the relentless hand of the moralist lays them bare that the world may see them, execrate them, and render them impossible for the future.

As a framework for this exposure, Zola has taken one of those huge dry-goods stores so long in favor in Paris and London, and steadily becoming popular in the larger

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cities of the United States. The emblem of this vast store is "THE BONHEUR DES DAMES." A complete history of the establishment is given; the reader is shown how its proprietor started it in an exceedingly small way, how its business gradually swelled and swelled, and how, ultimately, it became one of the most colossal of the colossal caravansaries of Parisian trade, spreading consternation and ruin in the ranks of competing houses. The description of this huge dry-goods store in the midst of its prosperity is realistic to the utmost, and complete even to the smallest feature. The reader can almost see the vast establishment, its counters and shelves piled with Parisian novelties and elegant goods imported from every quarter of the known world, so little work has Zola left for the imagination to do.

"THE BONHEUR DES DAMES" gives employment to hosts of shop-girls and salesmen, the majority of whom are young, good-looking and worldly-minded. The proprietor, Octave Mouret, who figured as the hero of Zola's "Pot-Bouille," leads a fast life, and surrounds his shop-girls with temptations so powerful as to be in most cases irresistible, the gallant salesmen, in their sphere, also doing their best to pervert the young and pretty employés. One of M. Mouret's favorite and most successful snares is a sumptuous dinner, to which the shop-girl he has singled out as the victim of his arts is invited.

Denise, the heroine, comes to Paris from the country to earn sufficient money to support herself and two brothers, one a sickly child and the other a robust youth given to dissipation and extravagance. She seeks and obtains employment in "THE BONHEUR DES DAMES" when her trials

and troubles promptly begin. Denise is a handsome girl, but has not the slightest inclination to step aside from the straight and narrow path. She is good and pure in the highest sense of the words, and the various temptations which have proved so fatal to many of her companions, when applied to her, utterly fail of effect. The salesmen shower their attentions upon her, but she does not heed their perfidious professions, neither does she give the least encouragement to the detective watching the establishment, who also enrolls himself in the long list of her ardent admirers. Then M. Mouret casts his eyes in her direction and grows deeply interested, but she baffles his advances and declines his dinner invitations. Mouret promotes her to a managerial post in a new department. Nothing, however, modifies her rigid rule of conduct, and, finally, her employer offers her his hand in marriage.

Of course, this sketch gives only a partial glimpse of the plot of Zola's new novel, but it will suffice to explain the aim and scope of the great romance, which is, in all respects, totally different from anything which its justly famous author has yet published. The language is strong and pointed, but, at the same time, is notably refined and free from harsh expressions. All the episodes are both novel and striking, while some of the incidents are of a nature peculiarly dramatic.

The fascinating book abounds in telling descriptions of Paris, such descriptions as Zola alone can draw. They are marvels of vivid naturalism, and present the French capital under every possible aspect, with all its peculiar characteristics. Zola's knowledge of Paris is so extensive that whatever he writes about it is sure to be exceedingly

graphic, and to bear the stamp of truthfulness on its face.

Denise is a heroine of whom any author might well feel proud, and the fact that she differs so radically from Zola's other heroines demonstrates conclusively that the great novelist is as keen an upholder of purity as any writer of fiction in the world to-day. The young shop-girl is sketched with a master hand, and it is plainly to be seen that Zola has taken special pains with her. There is nothing exaggerated about her. She is as natural as life itself, and her true nobility of soul fills the reader with admiration of the strongest kind. Her goodness and purity are inborn, and she seems actually to have no idea that she can possibly stray from duty and right. Her very innocence is, therefore, her safeguard and shield.

The other characters are drawn with equal skill and effect, and from the leading personages to those of but slight importance not one is carelessly passed over, a circumstance which shows Zola's profound knowledge of humanity, and the conscientiousness with which he executes all his tasks.

"THE BONHEUR DES DAMES" should be read everywhere and by everybody. It is one of the greatest and best novels of the day. John Stirling, the translator, has fully preserved all the power, strength and interest of the French original.

THE "BONHEUR DES DAMES."

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA.

AUTHOR OF "NANA," "L'ASSOMMOIR," "CLAUDE'S CONFESSION," "HELENE,"
"POT-BOUILLE," "THERESE RAQUIN," "THE MYSTERIES OF MARSEILLES,"
"MAGDALEN FERAT," "THE GIRL IN SCARLET," "ALBINE,"
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"LA BELLE LISA; OR, THE PARIS MARKET GIRLS,"
"A MAD LOVE; OR, THE ABBE AND HIS COURT."

TRANSLATED BY JOHN STIRLING.

CHAPTER I.

DENISE had come on foot from the Saint-Lazare station where a train from Cherbourg had brought her with her two brothers, after a night spent on the hard benches of a third class car. She held Pépé by the hand and Jean followed at her heels. All three were weary with their journey, frightened and bewildered by this vast Paris. They looked up at all the houses and stopped at every corner to ask their way to the Rue de la Michodière in which their Uncle Baudu lived. But when the young girl at last turned into the Place Gaillon she stopped short in amazement. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "look at that, Jean!"

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And they stood still, huddled close together. They were wearing out their shabby mourning for their father and were therefore all in black. She, thin for her twenty years, and with an air of great poverty, carried a light bundle; a small brother about five years old clung to her arm and a taller one, robust and sixteen, lounged a little behind with empty hands hanging by his side.

"Well!" she said after a long silence, "that is a shop indeed!"

On the corner of Rue de la Michodière and Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin there stood a large *Magasin de Nouveautés*, the goods displayed in the windows made the one brilliant spot in this soft, overcast October morning. Saint-Roch had just struck eight. There was no one in the street except employés going to their bureaux and housekeepers and servants running in haste to the shops.

Before the doors two clerks standing on a high ladder were hanging some woolen stuffs, while in a window looking out on Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, another clerk kneeling and with his back turned, was carefully plaiting a piece of blue silk. From the shops still empty of customers, and where as yet few of the clerks had arrived, came a buzz like that of a newly awakened bee-hive.

"Zounds!" said Jean. "That beats Valognes. Yours was not much like that!"

Denise shook her head. She had been two years with Cornaille, the first retail merchant in her town, in this establishment on which she had come so

unexpectedly and which seemed to her so enormous, appealed to her with irresistible force. She lingered, forgetting all else. The large doors on the Place Gaillon were all of glass and surmounted with gilding. Two allegorical figures, two laughing women with heads thrown back, were unrolling the sign "*Au Bonheur des Dames*." There were more windows along the Rue de la Michodière and the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, where they had recently added two houses in each street to their original establishment. It seemed an endless perspective of spotless glass and brilliant gilding. The interior was plainly visible. One young lady dressed in black was standing cutting a pencil, while two others behind were unfolding velvet mantles.

"The *Bonheur des Dames*," read Jean, with the rippling laugh of a handsome youth who had had an adventure at Valognes. "That is very good! It ought to bring everybody here."

But Denise was absorbed in watching the display at the central door, outside of which on the sidewalk itself was a pile of merchandise, "at a bargain," inducements to cause customers to stop and enter the shop. Pieces of woollen goods were draped from above; Merinos, Cheviots and other materials in neutral tints, slate gray, marine blue, and blue green, were labelled with huge white cards on which was the price.

On one side near the threshold was a pile of narrow fur trimming for dresses, down, white as snow, from the breasts of swans, rabbit skins to imitate ermine and soft gray bands of squirrel.

On the long table in the middle of the shop, were piled articles sold for almost nothing, gloves and knitted fichus, vests, and all sorts of warm, winter garments, striped and plain or with dashes of red. Denise saw plaids at forty-five centimes and mittens at five sous. It seemed to her like a Fair, it was as if the shop were boiling over and throwing the articles pell-mell into the street.

Uncle Baudu was forgotten. Pépé himself clutched his sister's hand and opened his eyes wide. A carriage however compelled the three to leave the Square where they had been standing. Mechanically they turned into the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin and followed the long row of windows, stopping at each one in succession. At the first they were fascinated by a complicated arrangement, at the next by parasols so placed as to form a roof like a rustic cabin, below were silk stockings hung on wire forms, some sprinkled with roses, others of all shades, and black that looked like lace. Then there were gloves, with the long fingers and narrow palms of a Byzantine Virgin, with all the stiffness appertaining to feminine trifles that have not yet been worn.

But the last window held these young people firmly rooted to the ground. An exhibition of silks, satins and velvets in the most delicious and delicate tints. High up were the velvets, black like a raven's wing and white like curdled milk. Lower down were the satins, rose and blue in rich lustrous folds, and lower still, the silks, the rainbow tints drawn up by skilful hands as if around a slender form, and through the

whole ran a light drapery of cream colored foulard. At the two ends were colossal piles of the two silks of which this house had the exclusive proprietorship, the *Paris Bonheur* and the *Cuir d'Or*, two exceptional manufactures which were expected to revolutionize the trade.

"Think of that *faille* for five francs sixty centimes!" murmured Denise, in amazement.

Jean began to tire of all this. He stopped a gentleman who was passing: "Will you tell me the way, sir, to the Rue de la Michodière?"

When he was told to take the first turning to the right, the three young people were obliged to go past the shop again, and in doing so Denise found it impossible to pass a window in which were displayed "*Confections des Dames.*" With Cornaille, at Valognes, she had especial charge of the confections. But she had never seen anything like this. At the back of the window she saw outspread, like the veil of an altar, a Brussels lace scarf of great value. Flounces of Point d'Alençon were looped in wreaths, and from above came a stream of all kinds of laces—Malines, Valenciennes, Appliqué, Point de Venise. Then the *confections!* In the center was a velvet mantle with its garniture of silver fox, on one side a silk circular lined with squirrel, on the other a paletot trimmed with cocks' plumes, evening cloaks of white cashmere trimmed with chenille fringe or swansdown. Every taste and purse could be suited, for there were wraps from twenty-nine francs up to the velvet mantle marked at eighteen hundred francs.

The wire frames held out the folds of the stuff—the large hips exaggerated the slenderness of the waist, while the head was replaced by the huge card held by a pin. Mirrors on both sides of the window were so arranged that they reflected these forms and multiplied them endlessly until the whole street seemed to be filled with those beautiful women for sale, who carried instead of heads, big cards with their price affixed.

"They are wonderful!" murmured Jean, who could find no other words in which to express his emotion. He himself had stood motionless and open-mouthed, charmed by all this feminine luxury. He had a certain girlish beauty of which he seemed to have robbed his sister—a dazzling complexion, russet-colored curling hair, with lips and eyes dewy with tenderness. By his side Denise looked thinner than ever with her long face in which her mouth looked too large—her complexion seemed already faded under her blonde hair. And Pépé, who was also blonde, was equally fascinated by the lovely ladies in the window. This little group was so quaint and striking—this sad looking girl between this pretty child and handsome lad—that people turned with smiles to gaze at them.

A stout man with white hair and a large, yellow face, standing at the door of a shop opposite, had been watching them for some time. He was looking with indignation at all this display at the *Bonheur des Dames*, when the evident admiration of this girl and her brother put the finishing touch to his exasperation. What fools they were to stand in this senseless way before the parade made by that charlatan.

"And the uncle?" said Denise, with a start.

"We are in the Rue de la Michodière," said Jean.

"He must live near here."

They looked up and turned around. Then, and only then, did they see above the head of the stout man a green sign, on which were yellow letters greatly faded by the rain:

CLOTHS AND FLANNELS.

BAUDU, *Successor to Hauchecorne.*

This shop had been once painted, but was now very dingy and dull. It had only three windows in the front, and these were square and simply ornamented with an iron railing. But Denise, whose eyes were still dazzled by the magnificence of the *Bonheur des Dames*, was struck by the low ceiling of this shop and its scanty supply of light. It was scarcely possible to see the color of the goods in the window. The open doors seemed to lead into the darkness and dampness of a cellar.

"There is the place!" said Jean.

"Well! then we must go in, that is all," answered Denise. "Come, Pépé."

The three were greatly troubled and overcome with timidity. When their father had died, carried away by the same fever which had taken their mother a month before, their Uncle Baudu, in the emotion of this double loss, had kindly written to his niece that there would be a place for her with him whenever she might decide to try her fortune in Paris; but this letter had been written nearly a year, and the young girl now

repented that she had left Valognes so suddenly and without first communicating with her uncle, who did not know them, never having set his foot in his native town since he left there, a very young man, to become a clerk with the draper Hauchecorne, whose daughter he finally married.

"Monsieur Baudu?" asked Denise, finally deciding to address this stout man who was still watching them with evident curiosity.

"I am Monsieur Baudu," he said.

Then Denise blushed and stammered:

"Ah! so much the better. I am Denise, and this is Jean, and this is Pépé. You see, uncle, we have come."

Baudu seemed thunderstruck. His great bloodshot eyes rolled in his yellow face, and his words came hesitatingly. He was evidently miles away from this family that had tumbled down upon him from the clouds.

"How! What! You here!" he said, over and over again. "But why are you not at Valognes? Why are you here?"

In her sweet, unsteady voice she began her explanations. After her father's death, who had lost everything in his dyeing establishment, she had been left to take care of the two children. Her salary at Cornaille's was not enough to support them all. Jean was with a cabinet-maker, a repairer of old furniture, but he received no wages. He had learned a great deal, and could carve figures, and even one day, having discovered a bit of ivory, he had amused himself in cutting a head. A gentleman had seen it—in fact,

it was this gentleman who had decided them to leave Valognes, and had found a place for Jean with a carver in Paris.

"You understand, uncle, Jean will begin his apprenticeship to-morrow. I have no money to pay, he will be fed and lodged. Then I thought that Pépé and I might do something here. We could not be worse off than at Valognes."

She said nothing about an escapade of Jean's, nothing of the letters written by him to a young girl belonging to one of the noble families of the town, of the kisses exchanged over a wall, of the scandal, in short, which had determined her to leave the place and to accompany her brother to Paris that she might watch over him. Her heart was filled with maternal solicitude for this bright, handsome fellow whom all the women adored.

Uncle Baudu was not satisfied. He asked her more questions, but when he heard her speak of her brothers, his voice softened.

"Your father then left you nothing? I always supposed there was something. I advised him in my letters not to touch that dyeing business. An excellent heart but no brains—no—no brains whatever! And you, child that you are, have these two boys to look out for!"

His bilious face lighted up. The expression with which he surveyed the *Bonheur des Dames* had vanished. Suddenly he perceived that he barred the door.

"Come in," he exclaimed, "you may as well come in

now that you are here. Come in, it is much better than to stand out here where we can see all this nonsense."

And with a heavy frown at his opposite neighbors he made way for these children, by himself entering the shop and shouting to his wife and daughter.

"Elizabeth! Geneviève! Come down, here is company for you!"

But Denise and the boys hesitated before the darkness of the shop. Blinded by the glare of the street they half shut their eyes and felt their way slowly and carefully with an instinctive fear of some treacherous step; and close together, with the child clinging to the maiden's skirts and the tall youth behind, they entered with a certain reluctant grace.

"Come on, come on!" said Baudu.

Then in a few short phrases he told Madame Baudu and the daughter who the new visitors were. Madame was a small colorless woman—hair, eyes and lips were white. Geneviève was almost as bad as her mother, and looked like a plant that has grown in the shade. Her hair was magnificent, and growing as it did where there seemed to be such scanty vitality, imparted to her a certain charm. "Come in," said the two women. "You are very welcome."

And they made Denise take a chair behind the counter. Pépé immediately clambered upon his sister's knees, while Jean, leaning against the shelves, crept as close to her side as possible. They gradually became more at ease, and their eyes, accustomed to the darkness, soon took in the oaken counters polished by long use, the piles of merchandise rising almost to

the roof. There was a smell of dyes and woollens brought out by the dampness.

At the back of the shop were two clerks and a girl arranging some pieces of white flannel.

"Perhaps this little gentleman would like to have something to eat?" said Madame Baudu, smiling at Pépé.

"No, thanks," answered Denise. "We took a cup of milk at a *café* near the station."

And as Geneviève glanced at the little bundle that Denise had laid on the ground she added, "I left one trunk at the station."

She colored, for she began to understand this was no way to make her appearance among these people. The train had scarce left Valognes when she began to feel timid and regretful, and this was why, on her arrival, she had left her trunk, and given the children breakfast.

"We must have a little talk—a sensible talk," said Baudu, suddenly. "I wrote to you, to be sure, but that was a year ago, and you see, my poor girl, business is not what it was a year ago."

He stopped, choked by an emotion that he did not wish to show. Madame Baudu and Geneviève dropped their eyes with an air of resignation.

"Oh! it will all come right, I know that," he said, "it does not trouble me, only for the present I have dismissed some of my clerks; I keep only three persons here now, and do not see my way clear to engaging a fourth. You see, my child, that I cannot take you as I promised."

Denise had become very pale. He went on:

"It would not be best either for you, or for us."

"Very good, Uncle," she replied with great difficulty.

"I shall try to find something else."

These Baudus were by no means bad people, but they pitied themselves, saying that they had never had any luck. When their trade was good they were obliged to bring up five boys, of whom three died at twenty. The fourth had turned out badly, the fifth had gone to Mexico as a captain. Geneviève alone remained with them. All this family had been terribly expensive, and Baudu made, in addition, the great mistake of buying at Rambouillet the country house of his wife's father, a great barrack of a place.

"You ought to have written to me," he continued, ashamed of his harshness, and lashing himself into anger. "Had you done so, I should have told you to remain where you were. When I heard of your father's death things were different, and I was too impulsive. I can't conceive why you did not let us know you were coming; it is really very embarrassing."

He raised his voice, it comforted him to hear it. His wife and daughter sat with their eyes riveted to the ground, they were evidently of submissive natures and never interfered. Jean in the meantime became very pale, and Denise pressed the frightened child to her heart.

"Very good, Uncle," she said, as two large tears dropped on P  p  's head. "We will go away."

He checked himself. An embarrassed silence reigned in the shop. Presently he began less vehemently:

"I am not putting you out of doors. As long as you are here, you must sleep under this roof to-night. After that we will see what can be done."

Madame Baudu and Geneviève saw that they could arrange things. There was no trouble about Jean as he was to begin his apprenticeship the next day. As to Pépé, he would be as comfortable as possible with Madame Gras, an old lady who lived in the Rue des Orties and took children under ten, to board at forty francs per month.

Denise said she could pay the first month. She must look for a situation for herself, she would try and find one in that quarter.

"Does not Vincard want a saleswoman?" asked Geneviève.

"Precisely!" cried Baudu. "We will go and see after breakfast. We must strike while the iron is hot!"

Not a single customer had come to interrupt this family explanation. The shop was dark and empty. The two clerks and the young lady in the rear continued their work with whispers and suppressed laughs.

Presently three ladies appeared. Denise was left alone for a moment. She kissed Pépé, her heart heavy with the thought of their coming separation. The child, with a pretty coaxing gesture, hid his head, and said never a word. When Madame Baudu and Geneviève came back, they said he was a dear little fellow. Denise assured them that he was never noisy—that he liked to be caressed, and was no trouble to any one.

At breakfast they talked of children and house-keeping, of life in Paris and life in the country, but in little vague, unsatisfactory phrases, like relatives who are embarrassed at knowing so little of each other. Jean had gone to the door and became greatly interested at all he saw, and at the pretty girls who smiled upon him as they passed.

At ten o'clock a maid servant appeared. Generally this table was laid for Baudu, Geneviève and the head clerk, and another at eleven was for Madame Baudu, the other clerk and the young lady.

"Now for soup!" cried the draper, turning toward his niece.

When all were seated in the narrow dining-room behind the shop, he called his head clerk, who lingered.

"Colomban! Colomban, I say!"

The young man excused himself, wishing to finish his work with the flannels. He was a stout fellow of twenty-five. His face was round, his mouth large and loose, and his eyes were cunning.

"There is time for everything," answered Baudu, settling himself squarely in his chair, and beginning to cut up a bit of cold veal with the prudence and skill of experience. The thin slices were of almost uniform thickness.

He helped every one, even cut the bread himself. Denise kept Pépé at her side, that she might make him eat properly. But the darkness of the dining-room disturbed him; she too looked about with a feeling of discomfort. She was accustomed to the large, light
rs of the provinces. A single window here over-

looked a little courtyard which communicated with the street through the black alleyway of the house. And this courtyard, damp and ill smelling, was like a well with a small circle of light at the bottom. On winter days the gas burned from morning until night in this dining-room, and when the season permitted its disuse, the room was more dreary than before. It was with difficulty that Denise could distinguish the morsels of food on her plate.

"There's a fellow with a good appetite," said Baudu when Jean had finished his veal. "If he works as well as he eats, he will be a big man! But you, my girl, have not eaten a mouthful. By the way, tell me, now that we can talk a little, why you never married at Valognes?"

Denise dropped the glass she was carrying to her lips.

"Oh! uncle. How could I marry? What would have become of the children!"

She laughed heartily at the idea. Then, too, what man would care to marry her—she hadn't a sou, she was no bigger than a sparrow, and was very plain beside. No, no—she would never marry. She had enough to do with these two children.

"Then you are making a great mistake!" answered her uncle, decidedly. "Every woman needs the support of a man. If you had come across some good man, you and these two boys would never have appeared, in this way, like wandering gipsies."

He stopped talking, to divide a dish of potatoes, with parsimony but with strict justice. Then, with r

wave of the spoon toward Geneviève and Colomban, he said:

"Now, those two are to be married in spring, if the winter season proves good."

This was the patriarchal habit of the house. The founder, Aristide Finet, had given his daughter Desirée to his head clerk Hauchecorne; he, Baudu, who had reached Rue Michodière with seven francs in his pocket, had married Elizabeth, the daughter of Hauchecorne; and he, in his turn, would surrender his daughter Geneviève and the shop to Colomban as soon as business justified his doing so. This marriage had been delayed three years from a scruple—from exaggerated probity. He had received the house in a prosperous condition, and he did not wish it to pass into the hands of a son-in-law with its trade and prosperity diminished and hampered by doubtful operations.

Baudu continued: "Colomban was from Rambouillet, as was the father of Madame Baudu, in fact, there was a distant relationship between them. Colomban was a good worker; he had been in the shop ten years and had worked his way up."

While her uncle talked, Denise looked from Colomban to Geneviève. They were sitting next each other at table, but they did not pay much attention one to the other—there were no furtive smiles exchanged, and no significant glances. From the day the young man had entered this establishment he had looked forward to this marriage. He had passed through all the different steps, and been by degrees admitted to the confidence and intimacy of the family. His

patience and regularity had been that of a clock. The certainty of having Geneviève had prevented him from desiring her. And the young girl, in her turn, learned to look on the arrangement as a matter of course. She loved him, with the gravity of a reserved, self-contained nature, and with a depth of passion of which she herself had no idea.

"When wishes and duties agree—" began Denise, smiling and trying to be amiable.

"Yes—that is about it," interrupted Colomban, who had not yet spoken, but was eating very slowly.

Geneviève turned and looked at him.

"It is only necessary to understand each other, and then everything is right," she said.

Their affection had grown to maturity in this *rez-de-chaussée* of old Paris. It was like a flower in a cellar. For ten years she had known him, spending all her days with him behind the piles of cloth in the subdued light of the shop, and morning and night they sat side by side in the narrow dining-room. They could not have been more secluded, had they lived on a desert island. One doubt, one pang of jealousy, would have shown the girl that she had given herself away entirely and forever, out of emptiness of heart and weariness of head.

Denise had noticed a certain uneasiness in the look that Geneviève had given Colomban. She replied, therefore:

"Ah! when one loves, one readily understands."

Baudu looked over the table. He had distributed slices of cake, and to celebrate the arrival of his rela-

tives he asked for a pot of preserved gooseberries, which liberality astonished Colomban. P  p  , who had been very good, was demoralized by the sweetmeats. Jean, who had pricked up his ears when the talk turned upon marriage, examined his cousin Genevi  ve; he thought her too pale, and mentally compared her to a little white rabbit with black ears and red eyes.

"Enough is as good as a feast," said the draper, "let us make room for others. There is no reason when we allow ourselves a little indulgence, that we should abuse it."

Madame Baudu, the other clerk and the young lady, now in their turn established themselves in the dining-room. Denise seated herself near the door, waiting until her uncle could take her to Vincard's. P  p   was playing at her feet, and Jean had resumed his post of observation on the threshold. For more than an hour Denise interested herself in what was going on. Occasionally a customer would appear—one lady, then two together. The shop retained its musty odor and its darkness, while on the other side of the street the *Bonheur des Dames* continued to attract her by its gayety. The sky was still overcast, and there was a suggestion of rain in the air, which was unusually soft and warm for the season.

The *Bonheur des Dames* was crowded; purchasers poured in and out; everything and everybody seemed in a flutter of excitement.

Denise had ever since the morning been under the influence of this fascination. This establishment, which she saw more people enter than had come into Cor-

naillé's in a half year, bewildered and attracted her. Mingled with her desire to pass through those doors, there was also a vague fear, which was in itself almost a delight. At the same time her uncle's shop made her feel ill. This chilly place impressed her with unreasoning disdain and instinctive repugnance. All her sensations, her timid entrance, the cool reception given by her relatives, the dismal breakfast in that prison-like room, her long waiting in that old shop where business was slowly dying, all culminated in a dumb protest—in a passionate longing for light and life. And in spite of herself, her eyes turned perpetually toward the *Bonheur des Dames*, as if she needed to warm herself in its glow.

"At least, there are people there," she murmured.

But she regretted these words when she saw the Baudus near her. Madame Baudu, who had finished her breakfast long ago, stood pale and stern, gazing at the monster before her, with mute despair. Geneviève watched Colomban with growing uneasiness. She saw that when he believed himself unseen, he stood in silent ecstasy watching the girls who sold the cloaks and mantles, whom he could see from his usual place. Baudu contented himself with saying:

"All that glitters is not gold. Patience."

He closed his lips for fear of saying too much. The family evidently were putting a great restraint upon themselves in the presence of these children, who had arrived only that morning. Finally the draper made an effort and tore himself from the spectacle on the opposite side of the way.

"Come," he said, "we must go to Vincard's. Situations are so much in demand, that to-morrow may very likely be too late."

Before he went away, he gave his second clerk orders to go to the station for the trunk Denise had left there. And Madame Baudu, to whose care the young girl confided Pépé, decided that she would take advantage of the opportunity to take him to the Rue des Orties to call on Madame Gras. Jean promised his sister not to stir from the shop.

Baudu, as he walked down the Rue Gaillon with his niece, told her how Vincard had created a specialty in silks. "He has had trouble like the rest of the world, but he looks twice at every penny he spends and so makes both ends meet. I think he intends to retire on account of his rheumatism."

The shop was in the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, near the Passage Choiseul. It was clean and bright, though small, and had not a very large supply of goods. Baudu and Denise found Vincard occupied with two gentlemen.

"Don't disturb yourself," cried the draper. "We are in no hurry; we will wait."

And discreetly withdrawing toward the door, Baudu leaned over his niece and whispered:

"The thin one is in the silk department at the *Bonheur*, and the other is a manufacturer of Lyons."

Denise comprehended that Vincard was trying to sell out to Robineau, the clerk at the *Bonheur des Dames*. Frankly and gayly he gave his word, with the facility of a man who does not attach much importance

to oaths. According to him, he was coining gold, and then he interrupted himself to complain of that confounded rheumatism which forced him to throw away such opportunities.

But Robineau, nervous and excited, became very impatient. He knew, he said, that a certain kind of silks had already been killed by the vicinity of the *Bonheur*.

"No, it is not that. It was Vabre's wife who swallowed up everything."

Then Gaujean, the silk manufacturer, interfered. Their voices were lowered. He was accusing the large shops of ruining French manufacturers; three or four of them laid down the law and governed the market, and he allowed it to be understood that in his opinion the only way to fight them was to favor smaller establishments, and the specialists to whom the future belonged. He then proceeded to offer large credit to Robineau.

"You see how the *Bonheur* has behaved to yourself," he said. "No regard has been paid to services rendered. You were promised the situation of head clerk, and had been expecting it for some time, when Bouthemont suddenly appeared, and without the smallest claim that any one can discover, obtained it at once!"

This injustice evidently still galled Robineau. Nevertheless he hesitated. He explained that the money was not his, it came from his wife who had inherited some sixty thousand francs, and he was afraid to risk this sum. He would prefer, he said, to cut off his two hands rather than compromise it.

"No, I cannot decide to-day," he said, in conclusion. "Let me have time to reflect. We will see each other again in a day or two."

"As you please," answered Vincard, concealing his disappointment under an air of extreme good nature. "You know that it is only my wretched health—"

Then coming into the centre of the shop, he said:

"And what can I do for you, Monsieur Baudu?"

The draper, who was listening with all his ears, presented Denise, told as much as seemed to him best of her story, and said that she had been in a shop in the provinces for two years.

Vincard pretended to be in great despair

"Oh! what a pity. I have been looking for a saleswoman for a week. But I engaged one not two hours ago."

Denise seemed dumbfounded, and no one spoke. Then Robineau, who had been watching her, was probably touched by her look of poverty, for he came forward and said:

"We need some one ourselves in the cloak room, I believe."

Baudu could not restrain himself.

"No, no," he cried, "she can't go to you—" Then he checked himself. Denise flushed deeply. To enter that great establishment! What joy! She would never have dreamed of it—and the mere idea swelled her heart with pride.

"And why not, pray?" asked Robineau, in great surprise. "It would be a good opening for the young lady. I advise her to call early on Madame Aurelie,

the forewoman. The worst that can happen is that she will not be accepted."

The Draper, to conceal his inward rebellion, answered in vague phrases. He knew Madame Aurélie, or, at all events, her husband. This man—the cashier, a big, stout fellow, had had his arm injured by an omnibus. Then, turning hastily to Denise:

"But, after all, it is her affair, not mine. She is free to do as she chooses."

And he went away after bowing to Gaujean and Robineau. Vincard accompanied him to the door, renewing the expression of his regret. Denise lingered in the middle of the shop; she was thoroughly intimidated, and yet anxious to obtain some more definite information from the clerk. But she dared not ask a question. She bowed her thanks to him silently, and followed her uncle.

Baudu never addressed a word to his niece. He walked so fast that she was obliged almost to run at his side. Just as he turned into the Rue Michodière, a man who kept a little shop opposite, beckoned to him.

Denise stopped her uncle.

"What is it, Bonnat?" asked the Draper.

Bonnat was an old man, with a head like that of a prophet, with a long beard and long hair, and piercing eyes under heavy overhanging brows. He sold canes and umbrellas, repaired them, and even carved handles, which had won for him quite a reputation as an artist in the neighborhood. Denise glanced at the windows of the shop where canes and umbrellas were arranged

in regular rows; then she raised her eyes and was amazed at the house itself; it was built in between the *Bonheur des Dames* and a great Louis Fourteenth Hôtel. How it was ever pushed into this narrow slit it was impossible to divine. It would certainly have tumbled down but for its supports on either side, for the slates of the roof were half off, the wood work about the windows rotten and broken, and the whole place in a state of entire dilapidation.

"You know that he has written to my landlord and made an offer for the house?" said Bonnat, looking steadily at the draper with his flashing eyes.

Baudu turned pale; his shoulders seemed to become more bowed, but he did not speak. The two men stood face to face in silence, for some minutes.

"We might have expected it or anything else," murmured Baudu, presently.

Then Bonnat shook his long hair and flowing beard in a rage.

"Let him buy the house, he shall pay four times what it is worth. But I swear to you that so long as I live he shall not have one stone. My lease has twelve years to run. We will see! we will see!"

It was a declaration of war. Bonnat turned toward the *Bonheur des Dames*, which neither of them had mentioned. Baudu shook his head in silence; then he crossed the street to his own shop, saying as he went:

"Great Heavens! Great Heavens!"

Denise, who had heard what was said, followed her uncle. Madame Baudu had just come in with Pépé, and said that Madame Gras would take him whenever

his sister wished it. Jean had vanished, which greatly troubled his sister. When at last he returned, with an animated face, and began to talk enthusiastically of the Boulevard, she looked at him with a sad expression which brought the color to his cheeks. Their trunk had arrived, and they would sleep that night in the attic.

"And what about Vincard?" asked Madame Baudu.

The Draper told of his useless application, and then added that a situation had been indicated to their niece, and with outstretched arm toward the *Bonheur des Dames*, he said, in a tone of intense contempt:

"It is over there!"

All the family were wounded by this declaration. That evening the first table was at five o'clock. Denise and the two children took their seats at it with Baudu, Geneviève and Colomban.

One gas burner lighted and warmed the little dining room, where the air was thick with the odor of food. The meal was a silent one. At dessert Madame Baudu, who could never sit still any where, left the shop to take a chair behind her niece, and then the flood-gates were lifted, and every body relieved their minds by dilating upon the monster opposite.

"It is your own affair, you are free," Baudu said again. "We do not wish to influence you—only if you knew—"

Then he told her the history of this Octave Mouret, a fellow who had come to Paris from the South, a mere adventurer, and who almost immediately began to make himself conspicuous with several women. There

was one scandal which had never yet been forgotten. And then came the conquest of Madame Hédouin, who had brought him the *Bonheur des Dames*.

"That poor Caroline!" interrupted Madame Baudu. "She was a distant relative of mine. Ah! if she had lived, things would have been different. She would never have allowed us to be assassinated. He killed her, you know. Yes, one morning she came to visit the buildings, then being put up, and she fell into a hole. Three days later she died. She who had never been ill in her life, who was so beautiful! I tell you, there is blood on the foundations of that house."

And she lifted her pale, trembling hand and pointed to the great establishment over the way.

Denise, who listened as to a fairy tale, shivered from head to foot. The fear she had felt all day long under the strong attraction this establishment held for her, came, perhaps, from the blood of this woman, which she fancied reddened the mortar that held the stones together.

"One would say that it had brought him happiness," added Madame Baudu; by "him" she meant Mouret, but she did not name him.

The Draper shrugged his shoulders in contempt of these fables. He resumed his narration and explained the situation from a commercial standpoint. The *Bonheur des Dames* had been founded in 1822 by the Deluze Brothers. On the death of the eldest, his daughter Caroline had married the son of a linen manufacturer, Charles Hedouard, and later, when she had become a widow, she married this Mouret, and

brought him the half of the shop. Three months afterward Uncle Deluze died without children, so that when Caroline died, this Mouret became sole heir, sole proprietor of the *Bonheur des Dames*. Was there ever such luck! A most dangerous man—a man who will change the whole *Quartier*, if he is allowed!" continued Baudu; "I think that Caroline, who was a little romantic, was carried away by the extravagant ideas of this man, who bought first, the house on the right, then the house on the left, and after his wife's death he purchased two more, so that the shop has gone on growing, always growing, until it threatens to devour us all now!"

He addressed himself to Denise. In fact, he was talking for her, recapitulating with a feverish desire to satisfy himself, the heads of this story by which he was haunted. He became very violent.

Madame Baudu did not speak again but sat motionless; Geneviève and Colomban with downcast eyes picked up and ate mechanically, all the bread crumbs within their reach. It was so close and warm in the little room that Pépé had fallen asleep, and Jean's eyes were gradually closing.

"Patience!" Baudu angrily exclaimed. "These people will fall and break their necks soon. Honest men need only fold their arms and wait for it. Mouret is passing through a crisis now, I know it. He has put all his profits in these mad schemes. Besides, in order to obtain capital he has induced his employés to place their money with him. He has not a sou now, and if a miracle does not take place, if his sales are not

quadrupled, as he hopes, you will see what a fall will come. I am not malicious, but upon my word I will illuminate when that day arrives!"

He continued his oration with such angry bitterness that one would have supposed the fall of the *Bonheur des Dames* would re-establish his commercial prosperity. Had ever any one seen anything like it! A shop where everything was sold—a Bazar. Then the clerks and the saleswomen who did precisely as they pleased, who treated the customers and the goods like so many packages, and who left their master or were dismissed by him for any trifle, a mere word was enough.

These people had no address, no tact. Now there was Colomban, he knew how to sell goods. The great art was not to sell much but to sell at a high price. He could tell, too, how he had been treated; how he had become one of the family; how his linen had been bleached and mended; how he had been nursed when ill.

To all these statements Colomban said, "certainly, certainly."

Baudu turned to him and exclaimed:

"You are the last, my good fellow. I shall have no more clerks, for of the present confusion which is called commerce, I know nothing, and I much prefer to go away where I can hear no more!"

Geneviève, with her head slightly inclined toward one shoulder, as if her thick hair were too heavy for her, watched the smiling clerk; and in her eyes there was suspicion, and a desire to see if Colomban did not

color under undeserved praise. But as he had been brought up under the discipline of the old system of business he retained his tranquillity, and his good natured air hid the expression of duplicity around his mouth.

In the meantime Baudu was continuing to call the people opposite assassins, who were laboring to destroy all home life among their employés; then was Madame L'Homme, her husband and son, all three employed in the *Bonheur*; they have no real home, they dined at restaurants and lived in a Hôtel. His dining-room was not large certainly, and he wished there was more air and light in it, but at all events it was his home. As he spoke his eyes wandered around the room, and a nervous trembling shook him from head to foot at the unexpressed idea that the savages might some day, when they had finished his shop, drive him from this home.

Notwithstanding the conviction expressed as to the final ruin of his rival he was in reality in deadly terror, for he knew well that the *quartier* was becoming slowly swallowed up.

"I don't tell you all this to disgust you, my girl," he resumed, trying to be calm. "If it is to your interest to enter that establishment, I shall be the first to say, enter it."

"I think I will try, Uncle," murmured Denise, who had become more and more desirous to enter the *Bonheur* as she listened to all that had been said.

He placed his elbows on the table and looked at her intently.

"Tell me," he said, "do you think it right that a *Magasin de Nouveautés* should sell everything. Formerly when trade was conducted on honest principles, *Nouveautés* included tissues, that was all. To-day the only idea seems to be to sell everything. This is what the *Quartier* is complaining of, for the small shops are beginning to suffer dreadfully. This Mouret is ruining them; Bedoré and his sister in the Rue Gaillon have lost the half of their *clientèle*; Madame Tatin who sells ladies underwear has been obliged to put down her prices. The effect of the establishment opposite is felt as far as the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs. I was told that the Vaupouille Brothers, the furriers, can't stand it much longer, calicoes and furs in the same shop! Upon my word it is ridiculous! That is Mouret's idea."

"And gloves too," said Madame Baudu. "He has a glove counter. Yesterday I was passing through the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, Quinette was standing at his door looking so sad that I really did not dare ask him how he was getting on. This poor Quinette will soon do nothing but clean gloves."

"Then he sells umbrellas," interposed Baudu, "that is the crowning folly. Bonnat says that Mouret has done this simply to ruin him; but Bonnat is strong, he won't allow himself to have his throat cut. Our day will come later!"

He went on to speak of other merchants, and passed the whole *Quartier* in review. Sometimes he would drop a word or two which he would seek to retract.

"If Vincard wished to sell, they might all pack up

and go, for Vincard was like the rats, who run away from houses just before they fall." Then he began to talk of an alliance between the small firms against this Colossus. His voice trembled as did his hands.

"I don't know that I have so much to complain of after all. As yet the scoundrel only keeps cloths for women's garments; light ones for robes, and heavier for mantles. People still come to me to buy men's clothing, velveteens, and cloth for lining, without speaking of flannels and such things, of which there is not a better selection than mine in Paris. But he exasperates me by planting himself directly in front of my door. You saw his display of goods; well, he invariably plants his most beautiful *confections* in a frame work, of big pieces of dark cloth. I should be ashamed to resort to such means. For more than a hundred years has my shop been known, and I never needed to place such heaps at the door. So long as I live the shop shall remain just as I took it, with its four pieces of goods, two on the right, two on the left, not more."

The whole family were thrilled with emotion. Geneviève finally spoke:

"Our customers like us, papa. We will hope for the best. To-day Madame Desforges and Madame de Boves were here, and I expect Madame Marly to-morrow for some flannels."

"And I," said Colomban, "received yesterday a command from Madame Bourdelais. It is true that she spoke of an English cheviot, ten cents lower on a yard than with us!"

"And to think," murmured Madame Baudu, in her slow, weary voice, "that we have seen that house when it was no larger than a pocket handkerchief. Yes, my dear Denise, when it was founded by *the* Deluze it had just one window on the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, where two pieces of cotton lay with three pieces of calico. One could not turn round in the shop, it was so small. Our establishment, which had then been in existence sixty years, was just as you see it now. Ah! how everything has changed!"

She shook her head; her slowly spoken words told the drama of her life! Born in this building, she loved every one of its humid stones. She had formerly been proud of it as the largest and the best patronized of any of the shops in the Quartier, and had been compelled to see a rival establishment grow up under her eyes. At first she had disdained it as of no importance, but it had become an open wound of which she was slowly dying.

Silence reigned. Baudu sat drumming on the oil cloth cover of the table. He felt a sense of weariness, almost of regret, at having allowed himself to speak as he had done. The family sat turning over in their minds all the bitternesses of their lives. Fortune had not smiled upon them. Their children were grown up and their business was good, when suddenly competition ruined them. Then there was the house at Rambouillet, the old country house to which the draper for ten years had dreamed of retiring. He was obliged to repair it continually, and his tenants never paid. This was his one extravagance.

"Come," he said suddenly, "we must leave the table for others. Words like these are useless."

Every one obeyed; the gas had made the heat of the room unendurable. Pépé was sleeping so quietly that it seemed a pity to awaken him, and he was laid gently down on a bale of cloth. Jean with a yawn went again to the street door.

"You must do as you choose," said Baudu to his niece; "we only tell you these things. Your affairs are your own, of course."

He was evidently anxious for a decisive answer.

Denise, who had become more than ever interested in the *Bonheur des Dames*, retained her tranquil, gentle air, concealing true Normandy obstinacy. She contented herself with saying:

"We will see, dear Uncle."

And she spoke of retiring early with the children, for they were all very much fatigued. But six o'clock had only just struck, and she could stay a little longer in the shop. She looked out into the street; it was dark, and a fine, drizzling rain had been falling since sunset. This was a surprise to her—the street was covered with puddles, the gutters were filled with dirty water, and thick, sticky mud covered the sidewalk. When she first looked out she saw only a mass of umbrellas moving to and fro like great black wings. She drew back with a shudder, and looked around the shop with a feeling of terror and of wonder that the great city of which she had heard so much could be so ugly.

But on the other side of the street the *Bonheur des*

Dames shone out cheerily. Behind the mist and the rain the windows presented only a confused mass of colors, but Denise saw the great velvet mantle trimmed with silver fox wrapped, as it were, around a headless woman who was hurrying through the rain to some great *fête*.

Denise stood in the doorway, regardless of the drops that fell upon her. She could not tear herself away from the *Bonheur des Dames*. It seemed to her the one spot of light and life in the city. She thought of her future, of the work she must do to bring up the boys, and of many other things that troubled her. She suddenly remembered what had been said about the lady who had died, and whose blood stained the foundations of the building opposite, and she caught her breath in dismay. Then the gleam of the rich satins in the window soothed her, hope and joy re-entered her heart, while her face and hands were cooled by the fresh air and the dampness.

"There goes Bonnat," said a voice behind her.

She leaned a little forward, and saw the old man standing at the window where she in the morning had noticed the ingenious arrangements of canes and umbrellas. The old man had glided through the rain to fill his eyes with the triumphal display, and in his sorrow he did not even feel the rain that beat in his face and saturated his long white hair.

"It is very stupid of him, and he will certainly take cold," said the voice again.

Then quickly turning, Denise saw that she had the Baudus again behind her. They had come in spite of

themselves to gaze once more upon the sight that nearly broke their hearts. Geneviève had satisfied herself that Colomban was watching the shadows of the saleswomen, and while Baudu was choking with rage, Madame Baudu listened to him with silent tears.

"Well! do you intend to go there to-morrow?" asked the draper, tormented by uncertainty and yet convinced in his heart that his niece was conquered like the rest of the world.

She hesitated, then answered gently:

"Yes, Uncle, unless it would distress you too much."

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning at half-past seven, Denise was standing before the *Bonheur des Dames*; she wished to present herself there before taking Jean to his patron in the upper part of the Faubourg du Temple. But with her usual early habits she had been in too great haste; the clerk had hardly arrived, and, fearing to be laughed at, she lingered on the Place Gaillon.

A cold wind had dried the pavement. From all the streets lighted by this gray sky she saw clerks hurriedly approaching, the collars of their coats turned back and their hands in their pockets, surprised at this first shiver of winter.

Most of them entered the shop without addressing word or look to their colleagues, others came by twos and threes, talking eagerly and all together, and every one of them tossed away the cigar or cigarette before they entered.

Denise perceived that many of these men stared as they passed her. This increased her timidity, and she determined not to enter with them but to wait for a while. But, as the clerks continued to come, she walked away and round the square. When she came back she found standing in front of the *Bonheur des Dames*, a tall, pale youth, who like herself seemed to be waiting for some one.

"Mademoiselle," he stammered, addressing her, "you are, perhaps, a saleswoman in this establishment?"

She was so startled by hearing this stranger thus address her, that at first she could not reply.

"Because," he continued, becoming more and more confused, "I want to see if there is any possibility of my procuring a situation there, and you might possibly tell me."

He was as diffident as she, but it was comparatively easy to speak to her, because he saw she was trembling as well as himself.

"I would gladly give you any information, sir," she at last replied, "but I know no more than yourself, and am here for the same purpose."

"Ah!" he answered, quite disconcerted.

And they both blushed deeply; they hesitated, neither daring to wish the other success. Then, as neither spoke, and the situation was becoming extremely awkward, they walked away to some little distance, and each fell again into their attitude of expectancy.

The clerks were still going in. Denise caught their jesting words and many an oblique glance as they passed. Her embarrassment became so great that she had decided to walk on for a half hour, when the appearance of a young man coming rapidly toward her by the Rue Port Mahon, caused her to delay a moment. Evidently this was a person of some importance, for all the clerks saluted him respectfully. He was tall and fair, with a carefully cut beard. His eyes were of the color of old gold, and had the softness of velvet

He glanced at her as he crossed the Square. He entered the shop, while she stood motionless, seized by a singular emotion in which there was more discomfort than charm.

Seized by a strange, inexplicable fear, she turned into the Rue Gaillon and continued to walk until her fear was conquered.

This young man whom she had seen was Octave Mouret in person. He had not slept the previous night, for on leaving a *soirée* given by a broker, he had gone to supper with a friend and two actresses, met by accident in the *coulisses* of a theatre. His palstot buttoned to his chin, hid his coat and his white cravat. He ran hastily to his room, took a bath and made a toilette, and when he seated himself at his desk in his office on the *entresol*, his eye was as bright and his complexion as fresh, as if he had spent ten hours in his bed. His office was a large one, furnished in old oak, and hung with green rep. Its sole ornament was the portrait of the Madame Hédouin, of whom the *Quartier* still gossipped. Octave cherished a very tender recollection of her since her death, and was duly grateful for the fortune which she had made him, in marrying him. Consequently, before he examined the letters awaiting him on his desk, he looked up at the portrait with the smile of a very happy man. Did he not always return to her presence to resume his work after all his adventures?

There was a knock at the door, and without awaiting a response, a young man entered. He was tall, and meagre, with thin lips and a pointed nose, dressed with

'great care. In his smooth locks gray hairs were already visible. Mouret looked up, and then going on with his work, said:

"You have slept well, Bourdoucle?"

"Very well, thank you," answered the young man, moving about the room as if entirely at home.

Bourdoucle, the son of a poor farmer in the environs of Limoges, had begun life in the *Bonheur des Dames* at the same time as Mouret, when the establishment occupied only the corner of the Place Gaillon. Very intelligent, very active, it seemed as if he might easily supplant his comrade, who was so much less serious, and about whom there was so much scandal, but he had not the impulsive genius of this impassioned Provençal, nor his audacity, nor his victorious grace. Therefore, with the instinct of a clever man, Bourdoucle drew back, recognizing his superior, to whom he was obedient from that time. When Mouret advised his clerks to invest their money in the House, Bourdoucle was the first to do so, he having received an unexpected inheritance from an aunt. And by degrees after passing through all grades, salesman, clerk and then head clerk of the silk department, he had become the most valuable of the six individuals who aided Mouret in the government of the *Bonheur des Dames*. These six were like the Cabinet Minister, under an absolute monarch. Each of these six had his especial duties—but Bourdoucle had the general supervision.

"And you," he said, familiarly, "did you sleep well?"

When Mouret answered that he had not been in bed at all, Bourdoucle replied, shaking his head:

"You have no right to trifle with your health in that way."

"And why not?" asked the other, gayly. "I am at this moment much less fatigued than yourself, my dear fellow. Your eyes are heavy with sleep, now, and you stupefy yourself by way of being sensible! Take my advice, amuse yourself, it will give you new ideas!"

This was their perpetual but amiable dispute. Bourdoucle professed to hate women; he declared they kept him awake when he wished to sleep. He entertained the greatest contempt for them, and their extravagances, of which he had many an example in the *Bonheur des Dames*. Mouret, on the contrary, adored women, and was continually involved in new affairs.

"I saw Madame Desforges, last night," he said; "she was charming at the ball."

"Then it was not with her that you supped?" asked his companion.

"With her! Good Heavens! she is a thoroughly respectable person. No, I supped with Héloïse, the little actress, at the Folies. She is a strange creature, but very droll."

He continued to write, Bourdoucle still moving about the room. He went to the window and looked down the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, and then coming back, said:

"You know they always revenge themselves."

"Whom do you mean?" asked Mouret, who had lost the thread of the conversation.

"Women, of course!"

Mouret laughed, and allowed his natural brutality to be seen under his air of sensual adoration. With a shrug of his shoulders he said he was quite ready to throw them in a corner like empty bags when they ceased to assist him in building up his fortune. Bourdoucle, unmoved, repeated, coldly:

"They will revenge themselves, or one will revenge all the others."

"I am not afraid!" answered Mouret, exaggerating his Provençal accent. "That one is not yet born, my dear fellow! If she comes, you know—"

He lifted his pen and brandished it in the air, pointing it as if it were a dagger ready to pierce an invisible heart. Bourdoucle resumed his walk, yielding as usual to the superiority of Mouret, but without in the least comprehending the reason of his friend's success.

A very long silence followed. Only Mouret's pen was heard. Then, in reply to a series of questions, Bourdoucle furnished the information required in regard to the opening of the winter *nouveautés*, which was to take place the next Monday.

It was an affair of great importance, in which the house had staked its fortunes, for the rumors in the Quartier were founded on truth. Mouret had embarked in extensive speculations, with an impetuosity which had in previous days greatly disturbed Madame Hédouin and which now, in spite of his immense success, often terrified those who were interested with him. He was blamed in whispers for going too fast and too far; he was accused of having enlarged his house too

hastily, before he could rely on a sufficient increase of customers, and when he was seen to hazard the entire capital of the establishment and pile up his counters with merchandise, there was a general feeling of despair. For this great sale he had made immense exertions. Once more he was to conquer or die. And he at this time, when everybody about him was anxious, was triumphantly gay and assured of the future possession of millions. When Bourdoucle ventured to insinuate a doubt, Mouret laughed.

"Don't be troubled, my dear fellow. We shall not go to the wall, the house is too small!"

The other was stunned at these words, and presently began to express his fears with no further attempt at concealment. The house too small! A house where there were four hundred and three employés!

"The truth is," continued Mouret, "we shall be obliged to extend ourselves before eighteen months are over. I am thinking of the matter seriously. This very night Madame Desforges promised to introduce me to-morrow, at her own house, to a certain person. But we will talk of this later, when the plan is ripe."

Mouret rose as he spoke, and patted the shoulder of his companion, who had by no means recovered his self possession. This terror of the prudent people around him, greatly amused Mouret. In one of those sudden ebullitions of frankness with which he occasionally surprised his familiars, he declared that he was in reality more of a Jew than all the Jews in the world. He had this from his father, whom he resembled physically and morally, and who was a man who knew how

to make every sou do double duty. If he inherited from his mother something of her nervous fancies, it had brought him good luck; it gave him courage and audacity to conquer anything.

"You know, at all events, that we will never desert you," said Bourdoucle, in conclusion.

Before these two men went down to the shop to look around it as usual, they had certain details to arrange. They examined together a small stub-book which Mouret had invented for the salesmen. He had noticed that merchandise when no longer in the first flush of fashion, was gotten rid of much more quickly if a commission on the sales was allowed to the clerks. On this observation he based a new commerce. He therefore allowed a commission on all merchandise, on the smallest bit of stuff, the tiniest trifle they sold. This change created among the clerks a struggle for existence, by which their employers benefited.

This new idea of his developed into a principle of organization, of which he made constant application. He let passions loose, set every force at work, encouraged the great to eat the little, and grew rich on this battle of interests. The specimen sent in of the new book was satisfactory. On the top and upon the stub, as well as on the slip to be detached, was the number of the salesman, and of the counter. Then on the two sides there were columns for the articles, the number of yards, and the price. The salesman signed this slip before sending it up to the cashier. In this way the supervision and control was almost absolute. It was only necessary to compare the slips held by the cashier

with the stubs in the possession of the clerks. Each week these last received their percentage without any error being possible.

"This is an excellent idea," said Bourdoucle. "We shall not be robbed half as much."

"And last night I thought of something else," continued Mouret. "Yes, at the supper table the idea came to me that it would be a good idea to give to the clerks, at the cashier's desk, a prize for every error they find in these slips when they collect them. Under such circumstances, you may be sure that not one will escape their observation, they are far more likely to invent them."

He began to laugh, while his companion looked at him with intense admiration. This new application of the struggle for existence enchanted him, for he had a genius for administration, and he was desirous to reorganize the house in such a manner as to make others minister to the gratification of his own appetites.

"Now then, we will go down," said Mouret. "We must see about our great sale. The silks arrived yesterday, did they not? Bouthemont ought to be on hand."

Bourdoucle followed him down stairs. Goods were received on the Neuve-Saint-Augustin. Drays discharged their merchandise into a room where they were weighed, and whence they slid down to the lower floor. Every thing went down this yawning abyss, a continual river of bales and boxes—silks from Lyons, woolens from England, linen from Holland, calicoes from Alsace, cambrics from Rouen. As he passed,

Mouret stopped and watched the slide; boxes were going rapidly down, apparently by their own volition. These were followed by bales, tumbling over each other like round stones. Mouret did not speak, but his eyes flashed at the sight of this incessant stream, which represented so many thousand francs per minute. It seemed to him that he had never had before so clear a comprehension of the great battle in which he was engaged. It was this enormous amount of merchandise which he proposed to throw all over Paris.

In the gray light that came from the windows high up, a crowd of men were receiving these bales and boxes, while others in the presence of head clerks, opened the boxes. There was an activity like that of a workshop, in this cellar where pillars held up a vaulted roof, and walls on which there was no stain of dampness.

"You have everything, Bouthemont?" asked Mouret, approaching a broad shouldered young man, who was busy verifying the contents of a case.

"Yes, I think everything is all right."

As he spoke, he looked toward a low, broad counter on which one of the salesmen was laying the pieces of silk as they were taken from the case. Behind this were other counters, equally covered with merchandise, which a crowd of clerks were examining. There was order in the apparent confusion, and meaning in all this babble of voices.

Bouthemont had a round, bright face, with a beard of inky blackness and handsome chestnut eyes. Born at Montpellier, a bragger and brawler, he amounted to

nothing as a salesman, but as a buyer he had not his equal. He had been sent to Paris by his father, who had a dry goods establishment at Montpellier, and had positively refused to return when his father wrote that he must now know enough to succeed him in his business. After this, a spirit of rivalry arose between his father and himself, the first being indignant at seeing a mere clerk make more than he, the head of a firm, made in Montpellier, while the son laughed at his father's adherence to routine, and upset the old establishment whenever he went home for a visit. Like the others, this clerk received, beside his salary of three thousand francs, a percentage on his sales. And all Montpellier with respectful surprise told how this young Bouthemont had the preceding year pocketed more than fifteen thousand francs, and these people predicted to the exasperated father that this sum would be greatly increased.

Bourdoucle took up one of the pieces of silk and examined the grain with the air of a judge. It was a *faille*, with a blue and silver selvage; the famous *Paris Bonheur*, with which Mouret expected to strike a decisive blow.

"It is really very good," murmured Bourdoucle.

"And looks even better than it is," answered Bouthemont. "It is only Dumontal who can make it for us. On my last trip, when I was angry with Gaujean, he wanted to try the same thing, but he asked twenty-five centimes more on the yard."

Almost every month Bouthemont went to Lyons, and lived at the best Hôtels. He had orders to show

the manufacturers great attentions, and enjoyed the most absolute liberty. He bought just what he pleased so long as each year he augmented, in a proportion arranged in advance, the profits of his department, and it was on this augmentation that he received his per centage. In short, his position at the *Bonheur des Dames*, like that of the other head clerks, his colleagues, was that of a merchant with an especial class of goods.

"Then it is settled," he said; "we will mark it five francs sixty centimes. You know that leaves little or no margin."

"Yes—five francs sixty centimes," answered Mouret, hastily. "And if I stood alone, I would sell it at a loss."

Bouthemont laughed.

"Very good," he replied; "I am satisfied. The sale will be doubled, and as my sole interest is to show large receipts, I—"

But Bourdoucle was very grave as he stood with compressed lips. He received his per centage on the profits, and he did not wish to lower the prices. The only power, however, with which he was vested consisted in watching the marks to make sure that Bouthemont, in his desire to augment the sales, did not make the prices too low.

He was uneasy, and he allowed this uneasiness to be seen by saying: "If we sell this silk at five francs sixty centimes, it is the same as if we were selling it at a loss, for our expenses upon it are considerable. It will be sold everywhere at seven francs." Google

Mouret was vexed at this. He tapped with his fingers nervously on the silk, and cried:

"I am well aware of that, and that is why I propose to make a present of it to my customers. The truth is, my dear fellow, you will never understand women. Don't you see how they will buy up this silk?"

"Unquestionably," interrupted Bourdouce, "and the more they buy the more we lose."

"And suppose we do? It will be at the most only a few centimes! What we want to do, is to draw the attention of all the women in Paris to our establishment. We mean that they shall be so dazzled and carried away by what they see, that they will empty their pocketbooks on our counters. You can raise the price on other articles as high as you please, and after this silk they will think everything else is an equally good bargain. For example, our Cuir d'Or—this taffeta at seven francs fifty centimes, which sells everywhere at that price, they will regard as an extraordinary bargain. In this way we will make up for the loss on the *Paris Bonheur*. You will see—you will see!"

He was becoming eloquent.

"Can't you see what I am after? I propose that in one week the *Paris Bonheur* shall revolutionize the place. It is our great *coup*—it is this silk that will make our fortunes. It will be talked of all over the city; that blue and silver selvage will become known from one end of France to the other. And you will see what a blow it will be to the other merchants. The small shops will have but one wing left!"

The clerks, who were verifying the bills of lading, smiled as they listened to Mouret. He liked to talk. Bourdoucle, as usual, yielded. In the meantime this case was emptied and another was uncovered.

"The manufacturers are not pleased," said Boutthemont, presently. "At Lyons they are furious against you; they declare that your good bargains ruin them. You know Gaujean has declared open war. Yes, he swore he would give long credits to small establishments rather than accept my prices.

Mouret shrugged his shoulders.

"If Gaujean is not more sensible," he said, "he will come to grief. Of what do these people complain? Do we not pay them immediately, and we take all they offer."

The clerks opened the second case, while Boutthemont verified the list. Another clerk at the end of the counter put the prices on in figures only known to the house.

Mouret stood looking on for a few minutes longer, and then, with the air of a captain satisfied with the appearance of his troops, he went off, accompanied by Bourdoucle.

The two slowly crossed the sub-cellar. Through the grated windows came a pale light, and in dark corners or narrow passages gas burned continually. It was in these corridors that reserve stock was stored. Mouret glanced at a furnace that was to be lighted Monday for the first time, and at the fire-engine which stood always ready. The kitchen and the refectories were on the left, toward the corner of the Place Gaillon.

At the other end of this great room they came to the place which sent out all such packages as the customers did not themselves take away. These packages were all classified and arranged in compartments, each compartment representing a Quartier of Paris; then by a wide staircase which came out on the street just facing the shop of the Baudus, they were carried up and placed in wagons that stood ready near the sidewalk.

"Campion," said Mouret abruptly to the head of this department, "why were not six pairs of sheets, bought yesterday by a lady about two o'clock, sent home in the evening?"

"Where does this lady live?"

"Rue de Rivoli, corner of Rue d'Alger—Madame Desforges."

At this early hour the compartments were empty, and contained only a few bundles left over from the previous evening. While Campion looked over these bundles and consulted a register, Bourdoucle looked at Mouret, and thought how strange it was that this devil of a man should find out everything, should think of everything, even when he was supping at a restaurant.

The chief of bureau discovered the error. The salesman had made a mistake—he had given a wrong number and the package had come back.

"Who was the clerk that did that?" asked Mouret.
"Ah! Number 10—I see."

Then, turning to Bourdoucle, he said: "Number 10 is Albert, I think. We will say a few words to him."

But before making the tour of the shop he wanted to ascend to the rooms on the second floor where all the orders from the provinces were received. Each morning he went there to examine the correspondence. For the last two years this correspondence had been regularly increasing, and where ten clerks were formerly employed, thirty were now kept constantly busy. Some opened the letters, and others read them on opposite sides of the same table; others again classified them, affixing to each a number which was set down in a book. Then, when all these letters were distributed through the different departments and the articles ordered were sent up from these departments, they were measured and ticketed and then packed in another room where men were at work with hammers and nails all day long.

Mouret asked his usual question :

"How many letters this morning, Levasseur?"

"Five hundred and thirty-four, sir," was the reply.

Bourdoucle nodded. He never expected that number of letters on Tuesday.

Around the table, the employés were busily occupied with a loud rustling of papers, while the various articles ordered were already being brought into the room. This department was one of the most considerable and the most important in the house, and demanded great celerity and care, for the orders received in the morning were invariably filled and sent off that evening.

"We will give you more assistants when you require them, Levasseur," said Mouret, who at a glance had

satisfied himself that things were going well in these rooms. "You are well aware that when there is extra work we will not refuse you extra men."

Above stairs, under the eaves, were the bed-rooms occupied by some of the saleswomen.

Mouret went down and entered the principal cashier's office, which was near his own. This cashier's office was a small room closed by a glass door, through which could be seen an enormous iron safe built into the wall. To the principal cashier two cashiers in the sales-room paid over the receipts of the day every evening. Here too were all the work people and clerks paid off. This office communicated with another room, where the clerks verified all the bills. Then there was still another bureau where six young men at high desks calculated the percentage due to the salesmen and made out the bills. This office, which was a new one, had not yet begun to go smoothly.

Mouret and Bourdoucle passed through the first two rooms but when they reached the last, where the six young men were laughing heartily, the laughter suddenly ceased. Then Mouret, without reproving them, began to explain elaborately the system of the little prize he had devised for each error discovered in the account; and when he had gone out the employés stopped laughing, and applied themselves energetically to their work, and to their search for errors.

Mouret went at once into the shop and to the desk where Albert L'Homme was polishing his nails while awaiting the arrival of customers. There had been a good deal of talk about the dynasty of the L'Hommes

"ever since Madame Aurélie, the head woman in the cloak department, had obtained the position of cashier for her husband, and of assistant for her son—a tall, pale, dissipated fellow, who never remained long anywhere, and who occasioned her the keenest anxiety."

But at this desk Mouret paused, he did not care to compromise his smiling grace by playing the part of detective, he preferred to act the rôle of an amiable benefactor. Therefore he touched the elbow of his companion Bourdoucle, whom he generally employed to do those things to which he himself objected.

"Monsieur Albert," said the latter severely, "You have again written a wrong address, and a package has been brought back. Such an error is inexcusable."

The cashier made an attempt to defend himself and called the boy who had done up the package. This boy also belonged to the L'Homme dynasty, for he was Albert's foster brother, and he owed his place to the influence of Madame Aurélie. As the young man tried to make him say that the error was due to the customer, he stammered and twisted his beard, divided between his conscience and gratitude to his protectors.

"Let Joseph alone!" Bourdoucle finally exclaimed, "and make no further attempt to defend yourself. It is very lucky for you that we esteem your mother and her services, so highly!"

At this moment L'Homme himself appeared. From his desk near the door, he perceived that something was wrong and hastened to the field. He was pale from his sedentary life, but his amputated arm was no hindrance to his duties. He spent his time counting

money, and people went to look at him out of curiosity as he rapidly turned over the memoranda with his left hand, the only hand he now had. The son of a teacher in Chablis, he had come to Paris to fill the situation of corresponding clerk with a merchant. He married the daughter of his *conciërge*, a little Alsatian tailor, and from that day he had been the humble and obedient slave of his wife, whose business abilities struck him with admiration and respect. She made more than twelve thousand francs by her *confections*, while he received only five thousand francs as a fixed salary. His deference for a woman who could bring such sums into a household was extended even to her son who came with her.

"What has gone wrong?" he asked. "Is Albert in fault?"

Then in his usual fashion, Mouret stepped in to play the rôle of benefactor and prince. When Bourdoucle had made him feared, he himself sought for popularity.

"It is only a mistake," he replied. "Your Albert is a very careless fellow, who ought to take example by you."

Then changing the conversation and showing himself even more amiable, he said:

"And the concert, the other day? Did you secure a good seat?"

The pale cheeks of the old cashier flushed. He had but one vice, music, and this secret vice he satisfied by going to all the theatres, concerts and rehearsals. Notwithstanding the loss of one arm, he played on the

horn, and as his wife detested the noise, he wrapped a cloth around his instrument and went into ecstasies over the strange dull sounds he extorted from it.

"An excellent seat," he answered, his eyes very bright.

Mouret, who took great delight in gratifying the passions of those about him, sometimes gave to L'Homme the tickets that Lady Patronesses thrust down his throat. And he finished his adroit flattery by saying, as he turned away:

"Ah! Beethoven—ah! Mozart. What music."

He joined Bourdoucle, and together they entered the silk department. They saw nothing there as they made their way through the respectful clerks, that demanded especial attention. But in the woolen rooms Bourdoucle resumed his rôle of executioner. He saw a young man seated on a counter, who looked worn out with a sleepless night. This young man, the son of a rich merchant in Angiers, bowed his head beneath the reproof, as he had but one fear, that of being called home by his father and of having his life of indolence and pleasure abruptly ended.

After this, much fault was found. In one department it was discovered that its head, who slept in the building, had not come in till after midnight, and in another the head clerk was caught finishing a cigarette. At the glove counter, the storm burst forth upon the head of one of the few Parisians in the house. Mignol's crime was that he had made a scandal in the refectory by complaining of the food. As there were three tables, one at half past nine, the other at half

past ten, and the other at half past eleven, he had to explain that being always at the third table, he was invariably served with warmed over portions.

"The food then is not good?" asked Mouret finally, in a pleasant tone.

He allowed one franc, fifty centimes daily to his *chef*, a terrible Auvergnat, who nevertheless contrived to fill his pockets, and the food was really execrable. But Bourdoucle shrugged his shoulders—a *chef* who had over four hundred breakfasts and over four hundred dinners to serve, could not be expected to attend to the refinements of his profession.

"Never mind," said Mouret, kindly, "I wish all my employés to have healthy and abundant food. I will speak to the *chef* about it."

And Mignol's complaint was forever shelved. By this time they had reached the door and stood among the umbrellas and cravats. There they received the report of one of the four inspectors of the shop. Jouve, a retired captain, decorated at Constantine, who was still a fine looking man with a large sensual nose, pointed out a salesman who on a simple remonstrance from him had called him an old fool, whereupon the salesman was immediately dismissed.

The shop was still empty ; a few early housekeepers were wandering about, but that was all. At the door, the inspector, who mounted guard over the arrival of the clerks, had finished setting down the names of those who were tardy. The salesmen were all behind their counters, every thing had been swept and dusted. Some of these men exchanged a cordial greeting, while

when Hutten, yielding to his natural gallantry and in the most amiable manner, came forward :

"No, Mademoiselle, this way."

He even went as far as the foot of the staircase with her. Then he smiled upon her tenderly as he smiled on all women.

"Turn to the left in the room above—the cloaks and mantles are then in front of you."

This politeness and his caressing manner moved Denise profoundly. It was as if a brother had extended a helping hand. Her heart swelled with gratitude, and she gave her friendship in the few disconnected words she faltered forth :

"You are too good—don't disturb yourself."

Hutten went back to Favier, to whom he said, in a low voice :

"She is a simpleton !"

The young girl ascended the stairs and found herself in a large room around which were wardrobes of carved oak. The windows of this room looked out on the Rue de la Michodière. Five or six women, quite coquettish with their well dressed heads and silk skirts drawn back, were talking very fast, all together. One of them, who was tall and thin, with a long head like that of a horse, was leaning against a wardrobe as if already quite worn out.

"Madame Aurélie?" repeated Denise.

The saleswoman looked at her without replying and with an air of disdain for her poor apparel, then turning to one of her companions, a little creature, fair but with a bad complexion, said : Digitized by Google

"Do you happen to know, Mademoiselle Marguerite, where the forewoman is?"

The girl, who was busy arranging some fur lined circulars, did not even take the trouble to lift her head as she murmured:

"No, Mademoiselle Clara; I haven't the least idea."

A silence followed. Denise did not move, and no one took any notice of her. After waiting for some minutes, Denise ventured to ask another question:

"Do you think Madame Aurélie will come back soon?"

Then the assistant forewoman, an ugly woman whom she had not seen before, a widow with a long protruding jaw, called out from a wardrobe where she was verifying some tickets: "You can wait, if you wish to see Madame Aurélie in person."

Then, addressing Marguerite, she added:

"Don't you know where she is?"

"No, Madame Frédéric, I do not," answered the girl. "She said nothing, so I suppose she will be back in a moment."

Denise still stood. There were chairs of course for the customers, but as no one told her to be seated, she did not dare take one in spite of her fatigue.

These young ladies had evidently decided that she had come for the vacant situation as saleswoman, and examined her out of the corners of their eyes. They showed her no kindness, but treated her with something of the silent hostility of people who, sitting at table, do not like to be crowded by those who come in hungry from without.

Her embarrassment increased. She crossed the room and went to a window where she could look into the street. Opposite was her uncle's shop, with its rusty front and its wretched windows. It looked so ugly, so forlorn to her, seen thus from amid the luxury of the *Bonheur des Dames*, that a certain feeling of remorse tugged at her heart.

"Say," whispered Clara to Marguerite, "did you see her boots?"

"And her dress?" murmured the other.

Denise, although she could not hear these words, was well aware that she was being criticised, but she was not angry. She did not think these women handsome, either the tall Clara with her brown hair falling over her neck nor little Marguerite with her milk white face. Clara Prundame had been employed as a seamstress at the Château de Manuel, but there came to grief and was sent away in disgrace. She finally made her way to Paris and to the *Bonheur des Dames*. Marguerite Vachon was born in Grenoble, where her family were linen merchants. She had been sent away from home for misconduct, but if she behaved well she was to return and manage her father's shop, as well as marry a cousin who was waiting for her.

"At all events," said Clara aloud, "I doubt if this girl gives us much trouble if she comes here!"

There was no time for any one to reply, for a woman of about forty-five entered the room. It was Madame Aurélie, her ample form buttoned into a tight black silk that glittered like a suit of chain mail. Under her bands of smooth dark hair were large steady eyes,

severely compressed lips, and large and somewhat pendent cheeks. Her position as forewoman imparted to her great majesty of countenance, that reminded one of a plaster cast of Cæsar.

"Mademoiselle Marguerite," she said in an irritated voice, "you did not send back to the work room that pattern mantle yesterday."

"It was Madame Frédéric who kept it, Madame," answered the saleswoman.

Then Madame Frédéric took the mantle from a wardrobe and there was much talk about it. Everybody bowed before Madame Aurélie whenever she thought it necessary to defend her authority; she was vain to that degree, that she would not be called by her name of L'Homme, and always spoke of her father's establishment as if he had been a fashionable tailor, and was only kind to these young girls when they bowed down in admiration before her. Formerly in the rooms where she had attempted to carry on her business on her own account, she had been ill tempered and irritable; she felt within herself a capability to make her own way, and was angry that she was held back by lack of means; and now after her success at the *Bonheur des Dames* where she received a salary of twelve thousand francs per annum, she seemed still to feel a spite against the whole world, and an especial spite toward beginners, because life had been so hard for her.

"That will do!" she said coldly, "You are no more to be trusted than the others, Madame Frédéric. Let this be attended to at once."

During this discussion, Denise had ceased to look down upon the street. She felt quite sure that this new comer was Madame Aurélie, but she was disturbed by the tone of her voice and stood uncertain what to do. The saleswomen, enchanted at this semi-quarrel between the forewoman and her assistants, went off to their duties with an air of profound indifference. Some minutes elapsed, no one had the charity to aid the young stranger in her embarrassment, and finally it was Madame Aurélie who perceived her, and astonished at her presence, asked what she wanted.

"I am waiting for Madame Aurélie."

"I am Madame Aurélie."

The girl's lips were parched, and her hands cold. She felt as she did when a child, and afraid of being whipped.

She stammered out her request and was forced to repeat it to make it intelligible.

Madame Aurélie looked at her without the slightest softening of her imperial mask.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty, Madame."

"Twenty! You do not look more than sixteen!"

The saleswomen had lifted their heads to hear this cross examination. Denise hastened to add:

"Oh! I am very strong!"

Madame Aurélie shrugged her broad shoulders. Then she said coldly:

"Very good, I will take down your name, as we do those of all who present themselves. Mademoiselle Marguerite, give me the Register!"

The Register could not be found, it must be in the hands of the inspector. As Marguerite went to look for her, Mouret arrived, still followed by Bourdoucle. They had made the tour of the entire shop, had been at the lace counter, among the shawls, and the furs and the lingerie, and ended in this department. Madame Aurélie drew them aside and talked with them in regard to an order that she wanted to give to a Paris house for paletots; generally she bought on her own responsibility, but, when a purchase was especially heavy she preferred to consult the heads of the house. Bourdoucle then told her of the reproof he had been compelled to give her son Albert for his negligence. She was in despair, that boy would kill her, she said, the father though not clever, had the best intentions in the world and was honesty itself. The entire L'Homme dynasty of which she was the head, gave her a great deal of uneasiness. In the meantime Mouret, surprised to find Denise in this room, asked Madame Aurélie what she was doing there: and when the reply came that the girl had applied for the situation of saleswoman, Bourdoucle with his contempt for women looked utterly confounded at her pretension.

"It is a joke," he said, "she is too ugly!"

"She certainly has no beauty," said Mouret, not daring to defend her, although still touched by her ecstasy, before his handiwork.

But the Register appeared, and Madame Aurélié turned toward Denise again. The girl had not made a favorable impression on the august forewoman. She was exquisitely neat in her scanty robe of black de

laine, and of course, its poverty was no drawback, as the regulation robe, the uniform of black silk was always provided, but her face was sad and she was thin. Without insisting that the saleswomen should be beautiful, it was nevertheless desirable that they should be pleasing. And under the examination of these women and these men, who looked at her from head to foot, as if she had been a mare at a horse fair, Denise lost what remained to her of her self-possession.

"Your name?" asked the forewoman, holding her pen above the page.

"Your age?"

"Twenty, and four months."

And she repeated, looking toward Mouret, whom she had met so often, and whom she still supposed to be only one of the head clerks.

"I may not look so, but I am strong!"

There was a general smile. Bourdouce examined his nails with impatience. The girl's words were followed by a discouraging silence.

"In what House have you been in Paris?" asked the forewoman.

"I have just come from Valognes, Madame."

This was a new disaster. Generally, the *Bonheur des Dames* exacted from its saleswomen a year's service in one of the smaller establishments of the city. Denise thought all was lost, and but for the children and but for the necessity of working for them, she would have gone away at once, and thus ended this series of useless questions.

"Where were you at Valognes?"

"With Cornaille."

"I know him—an excellent establishment," said Mouret.

As a rule, he never interfered in this matter of engaging the employés; the heads of the various departments had the responsibility of engaging those under them. But with his quick intuition where women were concerned, he felt that in this girl was hidden a wealth of grace and beauty of which she was herself ignorant. The good reputation of the House where Denise had been employed was of great weight, and Madame Aurelié continued with more suavity:

"And why did you leave Cornaille?"

"For family reasons," answered Denise, with a blush. "We have lost our parents, and I wanted to be with my brothers. I have a reference from my employer."

It was an excellent recommendation, and Denise began to feel quite sanguine, when another question came.

"Have you any other references in Paris? Where are you living?"

"With my uncle," she murmured, hesitating to give the name, fearing that the niece of the enemy of the *Bonheur des Dames* would not be received. "With my Uncle Baudu, opposite."

Again did Mouret interfere.

"Do you mean," he asked hastily, "that you are Baudu's niece? Did Baudu send you here?"

"Oh! no sir."

And she could not prevent herself from laughing at

this singular idea. She was perfectly transfigured. A lovely color rose to her cheeks, and her smile was as if her whole face had suddenly burst into flower. Her gray eyes took a tender light—dimples went and came, even her light hair looked brighter from her gayety.

"She is pretty!" said Mouret, in a whisper, to Bourdouce, who, however, shook his head, refusing to admit it. Clara shut her mouth closely and Marguerite turned her back.

Madame Aurelié alone seemed pleased, and gave Mouret a little nod, who then said: "Your uncle should have brought you here himself; his recommendation would have been quite enough. If he cannot employ his niece in his own establishment we will show him that his niece has but to apply to us to be received. Tell him that I like him very much, and that he ought to submit, not to me, but to the new conditions of commerce. And tell him that he will certainly come to grief if he is so obstinate."

Denise turned very pale. It was Mouret, then. No one had told her his name, but he had himself given her to understand who he was, and she now saw why this young man had caused her such emotion each time she met him, and even now her heart was heavy with it. All the stories told by her uncle returned to her memory, surrounding him with a mystery and an interest. Behind his handsome head, with the carefully trimmed beard, and the eyes the color of old gold, she saw the dead woman—that Madame Hédouin, whose blood had stained the stones of the House.

Then she felt a cold shiver run over her from head to foot; she fancied that it was fear of him.

Madame Aurélie in the meantime had closed the register. She needed only one saleswoman and there were ten names on the list.

But she was too desirous to make herself agreeable to Mouret to hesitate. The application followed its usual course—the inspector would inquire into the references, would make his report, and the forewoman would then decide.

"Very well, Mademoiselle," she said, majestically; "you will receive a letter."

The embarrassment still continued. Denise did not move. She did not know which foot to use or how to start. Finally, she thanked Madame Aurélie, and as she passed Mouret and Bourdouce, she bowed to them. They, however, no longer troubled themselves about her, and did not even see her salutation, for they were absorbed in examining with Madame Frédéric the model of the mantle. Clara shrugged her shoulders with an air of vexation, and looked at Marguerite as much as to say that the new saleswoman would not have a very easy time in her department.

Denise felt instinctively this indifference and jealousy, for she descended the stairs with the same feeling of despair and anguish with which she had ascended them. She asked herself if she could count on the place. She could not form any clear idea, for her embarrassment had been so great that she had been unable to judge. Two impressions began to stand out clearly—one was the fear she felt of Mouret, the other

was that of Hutten's great amiability, the only pleasant occurrence of the day. When she crossed the shop to go out, she looked for the young man that she might thank him with her eyes, and was sorry not to see him.

"Well, Mademoiselle, have you succeeded?" said a voice in her ear as she reached the sidewalk.

She turned and recognized the tall, pale fellow who had spoken to her that morning. He, too, had come out of the *Bonheur des Dames*, and seemed even more disturbed and bewildered than herself by the examination he had undergone.

"I don't know, sir," was her reply.

"That is the same way with me. They look at one so queerly in there and speak to one in such a way! I wanted to get into the lace department. I have been with Creve-Cœur, Rue du Mail."

They stood facing each other for a moment, and not knowing just how to separate, they began to blush. Then the young man, in order to say something, asked in an awkward sort of way:

"What is your name, Mademoiselle?"

"Denise Baudu."

"And mine is Henri Deloche."

They smiled, and yielding to the similarity of their positions they simultaneously extended the hand.

"Good luck to you!"

"And the same to you!"

CHAPTER III.

MADAME DESFORGES offered a cup of tea and little cakes every Saturday evening, from four to six, to such of her friends as chose to call upon her. Her apartment was on the third floor at the corner of the Rue de Rivoli and Rue d'Alger, and the windows of the *salon* overlooked the garden of the Tuileries.

On this Saturday, just as a servant was about to show him into the drawing-room, Mouret perceived from the ante-room through an open door, Madame Desforges crossing a smaller room. She stopped when she saw him, and Mouret joined her there, saluting her with an air of ceremony. But as soon as the servant closed the door he snatched the lady's hand and pressed it tenderly to his lips.

"Take care, people are there!" she said in a low voice, with a glance toward the *salon*. "I went to find this fan which they wished to see."

And with the end of the fan she gave him a little tap on the cheek. She was dark, somewhat large, with big, jealous eyes.

He had not released her hand, and he said:

"Will he come?"

"Unquestionably—he gave me his promise."

They were speaking of Baron Hartmann, Director of the Credit Immobilier. Madame Desforges was the

daughter of a Councillor of State, and the widow of a "man on 'Change" who had left her a fortune, a fortune which was exaggerated by some and denied by others. It was said that she had been too kind to Baron Hartmann, whose wise counsel as a financier had been of great use in the household, and later, after the death of her husband, this *liaison* still continued; but it was with the utmost discretion, never with the smallest *éclat* or imprudence. Madame Desforges was always received in the best circles to which her birth entitled her. And in these later days, when the Banker's passion had merged into a paternal affection, and she permitted herself to have lovers whom he tolerated, she carried into all her affairs such exquisite tact and such a thorough knowledge of the world, that appearances were saved, and no one dared to breathe aloud a doubt upon her propriety of conduct. Having met Mouret at the house of one of their common acquaintances, she had at first taken a great dislike to him, then yielded to the passionate love with which he attacked her, and by degrees had come to feel for him a true and deep tenderness. She adored him with the violence of a woman of thirty-five, though she acknowledged but twenty-nine; she was in despair at seeing her youth slipping away from her, and trembled at the thought of losing him.

"Does he know what is wanted?" Mouret asked.

"No; you will explain the matter yourself," she answered, with some little coldness.

She looked at him a moment, and wondered if it were possible that he could know the truth and yet

make use of her with the Baron. He pretended to think him merely as one of her old friends. But he held her hand closely, he called her his Henriette, and her heart melted. Silently she lifted her face and received his kiss on her lips; then in a whisper she said:

"Hush! they are waiting for me. Come in behind me."

Voices came from the grand *salon*, but they were deadened by the hangings over the door. She entered, drawing the *portiere* aside, and handed the fan to one of four ladies who were seated in the centre of the room.

"This is it," she said. "I was obliged to look for it myself, for my maid could never have found it."

Then turning, she added, in her usual gay voice:

"Come in, Monsieur Mouret. Come in through the small *salon*, it won't be so solemn."

Mouret saluted these ladies, whom he knew. The *salon*, with its Louis XVI. furniture, covered with flowered brocatelle, had a certain quiet, comfortable air in spite of the height of its ceilings; and from the two windows the chestnut trees in the Tuileries were seen blowing in the October wind.

"Upon my word, this *Chantilly* is not bad!" cried Madame Bourdelais, who held the fan.

She was a little blonde, about thirty, with bright eyes and a delicate nose. She had been a friend of Henriette's at school, and had married a sub-*chef* to the Minister of Finance. A member of an old Bourgeoise family, she managed her home and her three

children with activity and grace; also with a clear perception of the practical side of life.

"And you paid twenty-five francs for this bit of lace?" she began, after examining every stitch of the lace. "Did you say you got it at Lucca, from a work-woman? No, it is not dear. But of course you had it mounted."

"Of course," answered Madame Desforges. "The mounting cost two hundred francs."

Madame Bourdelais laughed.

This was what Henriette called a bargain. Two hundred francs for a simple ivory mounting, with a cipher. And in all this she had saved one dollar. At two hundred and twenty francs the same fans, all mounted, could be bought at a certain establishment in the Rue Poissonnière.

In the meantime, the fan made the rounds of all the ladies. Madame Guibal scarcely vouchsafed a glance. She was tall and very thin, with brown hair and an air of listless indifference. Her gray eyes at times, however, told a different story. She was never seen with her husband, who was a lawyer, well known at the Palais, and who, it was said, led an entirely independent life, always absorbed in his business and his pleasures.

"Yes," she murmured, as she handed the fan to Madame de Boves, "I never bought but two in the whole course of my life. One has so many given to one, you know."

The Countess replied, with delightful wickedness;

"You are very fortunate, my dear, but we are not all of us so lucky in having such gallant husbands."

And leaning toward her daughter, a tall young woman of some twenty years, she said :

"Examine the cipher, Blanche; did you ever see more exquisite work? It is the cipher that made the price so high."

Madame de Boves was over forty. She was a magnificent woman, with the port of a goddess, regular features and large, sleepy eyes, whom her husband, an Inspector General, had married for her beauty. She seemed much interested in the delicacy of the cipher, and then suddenly looking up, she said quickly :

"Give us your opinion, Monsieur Mouret. Is two hundred francs dear for this mounting?"

Mouret had been standing in front of this group of women, smiling as he watched their animated discussion. He took the fan and examined it; he was about to speak, when the servant announced :

"Madame Marly."

A woman entered: she was thin and plain, marked by the smallpox, and dressed with the most exquisite taste. She had no particular age, her thirty-five years might be thirty or forty, according to her mood. A small bag of scarlet leather hung from her right hand.

"Dear Madame," she said to Henriette, "you will excuse me and my bag. On my way here I was tempted to enter the *Bonheur*, and as I was guilty of some extravagance there, I did not dare to leave my bag in the *fiacre* at your door for fear of being robbed."

At this moment she perceived Mouret, and began to laugh.

"Upon my word," she said, "I did not know you were here; but you certainly have some wonderful laces at your place."

The appearance of this lady on the scene, diverted attention from the fan, which Mouret quietly laid on a table. And now there was a general curiosity to see what Madame Marly had bought. Every one knew her extravagance, and that she could never resist temptation if it presented itself in the form of dress, while a lover never moved her. She was the daughter of a clerk, and was ruining her husband, a Professor in the Lycée Bonaparte, who was obliged to double his salary of six thousand francs in a thousand ways in order to provide for the constantly increasing expenses of his establishment.

But she did not open her bag; she held it on her knee while she talked of her daughter Valentine, then about fourteen, whom she dressed as extravagantly as she did herself, giving her all the novelties which she so greatly adored.

"You know," she explained, "that this winter young girls wear dresses trimmed with narrow lace; consequently, when I saw a pretty Valenciennes—"

And she began to open the bag. The ladies watched her movements with eager curiosity. The silence was absolute, when suddenly the bell was heard.

"It is my husband," said Madame Marly, nervously. "He has come to meet me here on leaving the Lycée Bonaparte."

She closed her bag and thrust it under her chair with an instinctive movement. All the ladies began

to laugh. Then she colored at her precipitate movement and replaced the bag on her knees, saying that men never understood, and that it was not necessary they should know.

"Monsieur de Boves, Monsieur de Vallegnose," announced the valet.

This was an astonishment. Madame de Boves did not expect her husband, who, a very handsome man with a moustache and an imperial, entered with the military air so approved of at the Tuileries, and kissed the hand of Madame Desforges, whom he had known when a child.

And then he stepped a little aside, in order that his companion, a tall, pale youth, might in his turn pay his respects to the mistress of the house. But hardly had the conversation opened, than two exclamations were heard:

"What! Is it you, Paul?"

"Hallo! Octave!"

Mouret and Vallegnose shook hands warmly. Madame Desforges was, in her turn, surprised. They knew each other then? Certainly, they had grown up together at school at Plassans, and the odd thing was that they had never met before at her house.

The two men walked into the small *salon* just as the servant brought in tea, a china service on a silver tray, which he placed near Madame Desforges, on a small table.

The ladies gathered around the table, talking and laughing together, while Monsieur Boves, standing behind them, said an occasional word with the gallant

courtesy of a gentleman of the old school. The large room, bright with its tasteful furniture, became gayer still with these women's voices and their pearly laughter.

"Ah! Paul," said Mouret, seating himself on a sofa next to Vallegnose. They were alone in the small *salon*—a boudoir hung with silk *bouton d'or* in tint. They had forgotten these ladies, whose voices came to them through the open door, and they yielded to the charm of their old friendship and their mutual recollections of their school days at Plassans. They talked of the two courtyards, the damp school-room, and the refectory, where they ate such indifferent meals with such wonderful appetites, and of the dormitory, where pillows flew about as soon as the usher snored. Paul was of an old Parliamentary family—the *petite noblesse*—a family that was ruined and poor. He was always first in his classes and invariably set a good example to the other scholars. The professors predicted for him a brilliant future, while Octave, always at the foot of his class, was jolly, happy and indifferent. In spite of the radical differences in their natures, they had become almost inseparable, until they were graduated—one with glory and the other by the skin of his teeth.

After this the two friends separated, to meet again at the end of ten years, greatly changed and much older.

"Well," asked Mouret, "what have you done?"

"Nothing!"

Vallegnose, in spite of the joy he felt in meeting his old friend, had not thrown aside his air of weariness,

and when Mouret, somewhat astonished, repeated his question and said :

"But you must be doing something."

"No, I am not. I am doing nothing."

Mouret laughed ; but little by little he succeeded in making Paul tell his story—the ordinary one of youth, without fortune, who consider themselves bound by their birth to remain in the rank of professional men, and who exist in a state of mediocrity, content when they are not starving, to know that their diplomas are safe in their drawers. He had, according to the traditions of his family, studied law, and then he lived at the expense of his widowed mother, who had two daughters to settle in life. At last he had become ashamed, and leaving the three women to struggle by themselves, had found a position under the Minister of the Interior, where he was buried like a mole in its hole.

"And what do you receive there ?" asked Mouret.

"Three thousand francs."

"What a shame ! Ah ! old fellow, I am sorry for you. And they only give you three thousand francs, after already using up five years of your life ! It is outrageous !"

He interrupted himself.

"You know what I have become ?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Vallegnose. "I am told you are in trade. You have that great establishment in the Place Gaillon, have you not ?"

"Yes, precisely. Dry goods, old fellow."

And Mouret gave his friend a cordial tap on the

knee and repeated, with the gayety of a man who feels not the smallest shame at the thought of the trade by which he has grown rich :

"Dry goods, I say! When I took my degree to please my family, I might have become a lawyer or a physician like my comrades; but I was afraid to try it, for I knew so many that had starved in those professions. Then I made up my mind to do something better and to go into business."

Vallegnose smiled in an embarrassed sort of way. He finally said :

"I don't believe your degree is of much use to you in selling linen?"

"All I ask is, that it doesn't interfere with me." Then seeing that his friend seemed to suffer, he laid his hand on his shoulder and continued: "Come now, I don't wish to say anything unkind, but admit that your diplomas have not satisfied all your needs. Do you know that my head clerk in the silk department will receive over twelve thousand francs this year? He is a fellow of ordinary intelligence, who has learned orthography and the four rules of arithmetic. My ordinary salesmen receive three and four thousand francs, and they have never been at any expense for education. They did not enter the world with a promise signed and delivered that they should conquer it. I know, of course, that to make money is not everything. Only between the poor devils who crowd the liberal professions and starve, and practical fellows armed for the battle of life, I could not hesitate. I am for the latter, against the former."

He was becoming eloquent. Henriette heard his voice raised to a higher tone than usual, and turned her head. When he saw her smile across the *salon* and perceived that the attention of the ladies had been aroused, he laughed and repeated what he had said.

"I tell you, my dear fellow, many a millionaire is to-day hidden under the skin of dealers in dry goods."

Vallegnose had thrown himself back among the cushions. He had half closed his eyes in fatigue and disdain, partially affected and partly sincere.

"Pshaw!" he murmured, "life is not worth so much trouble; there is nothing amusing in it."

And as Mouret looked at him with profound surprise, he added:

"Every thing happens and nothing happens; it is just as well to sit with your arms folded." These words told his pessimism, the mediocrities and the disappointments of his life. At one time he had thought of literature, and from his association with the poets had gained a universal hopelessness. He believed that all exertion was useless, that life was dull and empty, and that the whole world was utterly stupid. He did not even find an unhealthy pleasure in doing wrong.

"Tell me, do you amuse yourself?" he said in conclusion.

Mouret had become indignant. He exclaimed:

"Amuse myself! Do you ask if I amuse myself? Of course I do, even when things go wrong, because I find amusement in the interest I feel. I do not take life tranquilly, I know."

He glanced toward the *salon* and added in a lower voice:

"I find some women stupid, I confess, but others are charming. And then there is something else besides women. It is delightful, if you have an idea, to hammer it into the heads of people and see it grow and develop. Ah! yes, my dear fellow, I am amused!"

All the pleasure of living, all the gayety of existence were in these words. He went on to say that in these times it was utter folly to refuse to work; and he laughed at the thousand isms of the day, the weakness of our new born sciences, at the sentimental words of the poets, and the airs of the skeptics. A pretty rôle and an intelligent one was it not, to yawn with *ennui* before the labors of others.

"But this is my only pleasure," said Vallegnose, with his cold smile.

All at once Mouret's passion fell. He became once more affectionate.

"Ah! Paul, you are still the same, still paradoxical. But we have not found each other only to quarrel. Everybody has, fortunately, his own ideas in this world. But you must come and see me and my work. And now tell me, are your mother and sisters well? And was not there some talk at Plassans about your marrying, six months ago?"

A sudden movement of Paul's checked his friend, and as the eyes of the former were riveted on the *salon*, Mouret turned and noticed that Mademoiselle de Boves was watching them.

Blanche was tall and large like her mother, but in the young girl the same features were heavy and coarse.

Paul, in reply to a discreet question, answered that nothing was decided as yet, perhaps never would be. He had met the young lady here at the house of Madame Desforges, where he had come a good deal the previous winter, but where he now came but rarely. This fact explained why he had never met Octave. The Boves received him very cordially, and he liked the father especially, a most amiable man. But there was no fortune. Madame de Boves had brought her husband nothing but her Juno like beauty; the family managed to live, though their estate was heavily mortgaged, on the salary received by the Count as inspector; and these ladies, the mother and daughter, had so little money that they were often obliged to make their own dresses.

"Why then—?" began Mouret.

"You may well ask," answered Vallegnose, with a weary fall of the eyelids, "but there is an aunt, and no one can tell what she may do."

Meanwhile Mouret, who was watching Monsieur de Boves, who sat near Madame Guibal, and showered attentions upon her, turned toward his friend with a significant wink.

"No! she is not the one, not yet at least. Unfortunately his duties call him perpetually to the four corners of France, and he has therefore a thousand excuses for his disappearances. Last month, when his wife thought him at Perpegren, he was living at an Hôtel with a music teacher, in a retired *quartier*."

There was a long silence which the young man broke. He had been watching the gallantries of the Count toward Madame Guibal.

"I don't know but you are right after all. The lady is not of too rigid virtue, at least that is what is said of her. But just watch him a moment. He is the impersonation of old France. I adore that man, and if I marry his daughter it is for his sake!"

Mouret laughed, he was greatly amused. He questioned Vallegnose, and when he heard that the first idea of the marriage between Blanche and Paul came from Madame Desforges, he was still more interested. This good Henriette took immense pleasure in match-making, and when she had provided for the girls, she allowed the fathers to choose their friends in her circle; but all she did was so quietly done that there was not the smallest ground for scandal. And Mouret, who loved her as men love who are busy and active, forgot his usual tenderness, and felt for her a spirit of *camaraderie*.

At this moment she appeared in the doorway of the small *salon*. She was followed by an elderly man of about sixty, who had entered the drawing-room unnoticed by Mouret or Vallegnose. The ladies occasionally raised their voices somewhat shrilly to an accompaniment of rattling tea-cups and silver, and once in a while came the sound of a saucer placed with too much force on the marble table. Through the window came the level rays of the setting sun gilding the summits of the chestnut trees in the garden, and lighting up the red damask and brasses in the *salon*.

"This way, dear Baron," said Madame Desforges. "I wish to present Monsieur Octave Mouret, who has a warm desire to testify his great admiration for you."

And, turning toward Octave, she added :

"The Baron Hartmann!"

A faint smile was on the lips of the old man. He was small and vigorous in his appearance, with a large head and heavy features, which lighted up as he spoke. For the past fortnight he had resisted Henriette's wishes when she urged this interview; not because he was in the least jealous—for he had become resigned to his paternal rôle; but because this was the third friend whom Henriette had introduced to him, and he was afraid of being made ridiculous.

When, therefore, he met Octave he had the discreet air of a man, who, if willing to be agreeable and obliging, does not choose to be considered a dupe.

"Oh! sir," said Mouret, with his Southern enthusiasm, "the last operation of the *Credit Immobilier* was simply amazing. I cannot tell you how happy and proud I am to take you by the hand!"

"You are too kind, sir, too kind!" the Baron replied, still with a smile.

Henriette looked on with her bright eyes, in which was no tinge of embarrassment. She stood between the two, turning toward one and then toward the other; and in her silks and laces, which left her delicate throat and wrists uncovered, she looked very pretty, and delighted at seeing the harmony of her two friends.

"I will leave you to talk together a while," she said,

and then turning to Paul, she asked if he would not take a cup of tea.

"Most gladly, Madame," he replied.

And they returned to the *salon*.

Mouret resumed his seat on the sofa, when the Baron Hartmann had first established himself there. Then the young man began a new eulogy on the operations of the *Credit Immobilier*, from which he glided off to the subject he had most at heart; he spoke of the new street, of the prolongation of the Rue Reaumur, of which a section was to be opened under the name of the Rue du Dix-Decembre, between the Place de la Bourse and the Place de l'Opera. Its utility and expediency had been declared eighteen months previously, the appropriation had been made and the whole *Quartier* was eager for this immense work to begin, and interested to know which houses would be condemned. For three years Mouret had eagerly awaited these movements, at first mainly with the idea that it would bring him more customers, but later with other plans and ideas which he dared not breathe aloud, so greatly had his dreams expanded. As the Rue du Dix-Decembre was to cut through the Rue de Choiseul and the Rue de la Michodière, he saw the *Bonheur des Dames* with a palatial front on the new street, and from this vision arose his ardent desire to know Baron Hartmann, after he had learned that the *Credit Immobilier*, by an agreement with the Administration, had engaged to cut through the Rue du Dix-Decembre, on condition that the property fronting on this street should be ceded to them.

"Do you mean," he asked, trying to assume an artless air, "that you will give them the street all graded and with gutters, sidewalks and gas? And will the frontage indemnify you? Upon my word, it is most curious."

He had now reached a most delicate point. He knew that the *Credit Immobilier* had secretly purchased the houses on the side of the street where stood the *Bonheur des Dames*—not only those which were to be demolished, but also others, which were to be left standing. And as he scented in this fact, some project of an establishment which should conflict with his interests, he was very uneasy in regard to the additions which he was dreaming of making to the *Bonheur*. He did not like the idea of falling some day against a powerful Company which would not be likely to allow valuable property to slip through their fingers. It was this fear which decided him to form some connecting link between the Baron and himself. This link he found in a very charming woman. He would certainly have liked to see the financier in his private office where he could talk at ease of the grand transaction which he wished to propose to him, but he felt stronger at Henriette's, where she was ready to convince them with a smile.

"Have you not bought the Hôtel Duvillard—that old building next to me?" he suddenly asked.

Baron Hartmann hesitated a moment; then he said "No." But Mouret, looking him in the face, began to laugh, and acted to perfection the rôle of a good-natured young fellow, who was frank and impulsive.

"Come, now," he said, "since I have been fortunate enough to meet you in this unexpected manner, I must really confess myself. Oh! I don't ask for any of your secrets in return, but I shall confide mine to you because I am convinced that I cannot put them in safer hands. Besides, I need your advice, and have been long making up my mind to go to see you."

He made his confession. He told of all he had done, and did not attempt to conceal the fact that he was even then passing through a financial crisis, great as was his success. He unfolded his most private affairs; he told how all his capital, all the yearly profits were regularly embarked in his business, and how his employés had risked their savings by placing them in his House.

But it was not money he now wanted, for he had unbounded faith in his increasing circle of customers. No, his ambition flew higher. He proposed to the Baron an association to which the *Credit Immobilier* would bring the colossal palace of which he had dreamed, while he in his turn would give his genius and the trade he had already created.

"What do you purpose to do with your land?" he asked earnestly, "you have some idea of course. But I am certain that it is not equal to mine. Think of it! We can build a series of shops under one head, which shall be the largest in Paris—a Bazar where we can make millions—Ah! If I were only you!" he continued with enthusiasm. "As for myself, I can do nothing alone. We ought to understand each other."

"My dear sir!" expostulated Baron Hartmann. "Your imagination is too lively."

The Baron shook his head, he continued to smile, determined not to give confidence for confidence. The plan of the *Credit Immobilier* was to create on the Rue du Dix-Decembre and connected with the Grand Hôtel, a luxurious establishment, the central situation of which should attract strangers; but as this Hôtel would occupy only the frontage, the Baron could still carry out Mouret's idea. But having already served two of Henriette's friends he was a little weary of enacting the part of a compliant protector. In spite, too, of his appreciation of the activity and enterprise which induced him to open his purse to all young men who showed courage and intelligence, the commercial *coup* suggested by Mouret astonished more than attracted him.

Was it not a hazardous enterprise? Was not a shop of the size contemplated, out of all proportion to the demand for such goods? No, he did not believe in it, and he declined.

"The idea," he said, "is not without its charm, only it is the idea of a poet. Where on earth would you find customers to fill such a cathedral?"

Mouret looked at him a moment in silence, almost stupefied by this refusal. Could it be possible that a man of such acuteness could be so blind! Suddenly he raised his arm and with an impassioned gesture pointed to the ladies in the *salon*, as he cried:

"Customers, did you say? There they are!"

The sun was sinking fast, a soft golden light lingered

among the folds of the hangings, but the glow and brilliancy had gone. As darkness came on the ladies drew more closely together and talked in low whispers of a recent ball.

Madame de Boves was describing a costume.

"It was mauve with flounces of old Alençon, thirty centimetres wide."

"Is it possible!" interrupted Madame Marly. "How happy some women are!"

Baron Hartmann who had followed Mouret's gesture, looked at these ladies through the open door. He listened to them with one ear, while the young man, fired with a desire to convince him, went on to explain his plan.

"Trade," he said, "was based on the continued and rapid turning over of capital, which," he said, "should be exchanged for merchandise as often as possible in the same year. For example: his capital that same year, which was only five hundred thousand francs, had been turned over four times, and had thus produced two million; he was convinced that in certain branches he could with advantage turn it over fifteen or twenty times.

"You see, sir," he said, "the whole secret lies here. Our only struggle is to get rid with all possible speed of all merchandise in stock, and replace it with something else. In this way we can content ourselves with very small profit. Our general expenses run up to sixteen per cent., and as we never realize on our goods more than twenty per cent., we make four per cent. when we operate on enormous quantities of merchandise."

dise. Merchandise constantly renewed, becomes an affair of millions. You follow me, do you not?"

The Baron shook his head. He who had ventured on the boldest combinations and whose audacious enterprises were still spoken of, was uneasy and obstinate.

"I understand perfectly," he said. "You sell cheaply that you may sell largely, and you sell largely that you may sell cheaply, that is about it. Only you must sell, and that brings me back to my original question: to whom will you sell? How can you hope to keep up such an enormous sale as is essential to your business?"

A sudden outburst of voices from the *salon*, cut Mouret's explanations short. Madame Guibal had said that she should have preferred the flounces of old Alençon arranged *en tablier*.

"But my dear," said Madame de Boves, "the *tablier* was covered also. I never saw anything more superb."

"You have given me an idea," exclaimed Madame Desforges. "I have some good Alençon. I must have more for a trimming!"

The voices died away into a low murmur in which prices and widths were eagerly discussed.

"You see," said Mouret, when he could speak, "we can sell whatever we choose, when we know how to sell. Our triumph is there."

Then in his southern, impassioned way he began to talk of the great possibilities involved in his plan; how a fair customer could buy the stuff at one counter, the trimmings at another, the thread at a third, and then

too the innumerable temptations offered by thousands of pretty useless trifles. He spoke of the new habit of marking prices in plain distinct figures. If the old manner of doing business was passing away, it was because it could not stand the struggle entailed by these legible marks. At present a walk through the various shops established the prices, and each shop contented itself with the smallest possible profits. Nowhere were fabrics sold at twice their value, but operations were regular—a certain percentage on all merchandise.

"I tell you," cried Mouret, "the women are all with me—and that is enough!"

Baron Hartmann looked at the young man curiously. He was moved by his enthusiasm and energy, and began to like him a little.

"Hush!" he said, "you will be overheard."

But the ladies were all now talking at once, and so excited that no one heard a word the others were saying.

Madame de Boves finished the description of the toilette—a tunic of mauve silk draped with lace, the corsage very low, and knots of lace on the shoulders.

"You will see," she said, "I can make a waist for myself like it of satin—"

"I want velvet," interrupted Madame Bourdelais; "sometimes one comes across a tremendous bargain."

Then they all spoke at once in tones of ecstasy, of toilettes they imagined, and of purchases they proposed to make.

Mouret in the meantime, after a glance at the *salon*

continued his whispered confidences in the ear of the Baron, and explained the mechanism of modern commerce. "It was women," he said, "who were the main-spring of trade. It was they who were to be enticed, tempted and bewildered. They were attracted by bargains and tranquilized by the plain figures of the prices attached. They were vanquished at first by appeals to them as housekeepers, and then carried away by their love of novelty and fashion."

Under his words and flattering phrases, Mouret showed the brutality of a Jew who sells a woman by the pound. He builds a temple in her honor and creates a new religion; he thinks only of her and seeks perpetually new ways of gratifying her caprices and tastes, and while he empties her purse and racks her nerves, he is full of the secret contempt of the man to whom a woman has been stupid enough to give herself.

"The truth is," said Mouret in a low voice to the Baron, "you can sell anything to women!"

The Baron began to understand and pricked up his ears. He looked wise, and ended by admiring the inventor of this means of tempting women.

"Well, my dear sir," asked Mouret, "will you join me? What do you say?"

The Baron, half conquered, did yet not wish to commit himself, and struggled against the fascination of his new acquaintance. He was about to reply in an evasive fashion when an urgent summons from the ladies spared him the trouble. Several voices cried:

"Monsieur Mouret! Monsieur Mouret!"

And as Mouret, annoyed by the interruption, pretended not to hear, Madame de Boves came to the door of the small *salon*.

"You are wanted, Monsieur Mouret," she said. "It is really very ungallant to bury yourself in a corner in this way to talk business!"

Then he rose with apparent good grace, one might have said with joy, and walked into the *salon*. The Baron followed, with feelings of mingled admiration and wonder.

"I am at your service, ladies," said Mouret, with a smile.

He was welcomed by the feminine group which opened to make room for him. The sun had set behind the trees in the garden, and darkness was gathering in the room. It was that delicious hour when day had gone and lamps not yet lighted.

Monsieur de Boves and Vallegnose were still standing before a window, their shadows dark upon the carpet, while motionless, in the other window, was Monsieur Marly, who had gone there because bored and discomfited by the conversation of these ladies on the all important subject of dress. His face was pale with his duties as Professor, and he stood slender and erect in his tight-fitting coat.

"Is it on Monday next that you have your grand opening?" asked Madame Marly.

"Yes, Madame," answered Mouret in a flute-like voice, a voice he invariably assumed when he spoke to women.

Henriette then spoke:

"You know we are all going," she said. "We hear that you have prepared wonders."

"I don't know about 'wonders,'" he murmured, with an air of modesty, "I simply try to be worthy of your approval."

But they plied him with questions. Madame Bourdelais, Madame Guibal, Blanche herself, wished to know.

"Will you not tell us some of the particulars?" urged Madame de Boves. "We are dying to know."

And they surrounded him, but Henriette remarked that he had not had even a cup of tea. It was too bad. Four of the ladies immediately hastened to serve him, on condition that he should answer their questions.

Henriette poured out the tea. Madame Marly held the cup, while Madame de Boves and Madame Bourdelais disputed the honor of sugaring it. Then, when he refused to take a chair and began to drink his tea slowly, standing among them, they all gathered about him and looked up into his face with smiles and shining eyes.

"Tell us about your silk, your *Paris Bonheur*, of which all the newspapers are full," said Madame Marly, eagerly.

"Oh!" he replied, "it is really a most extraordinary bargain—a *faillie* and a *gros grain*, soft and lustrous. You will see it, ladies, and you will see it only with us, for we have the exclusive control of it."

"Do you really mean that it is a handsome silk at five francs, sixty centimes!" said Madame Bourdelais, enthusiastically. "It is incredible!"

This silk had assumed considerable importance in their daily lives. They had talked a great deal about it, and were eager as well as doubtful. The innumerable questions they asked showed their especial characteristics. Madame Marly, eager only to spend money, took everything and anything at the *Bonheur*. Madame Guibal spent hours in the shop without making a single purchase, happy in feasting her eyes; Madame de Boves, always short of money, and tortured by her desire for these things which she could not buy, and feeling a certain anger against the very goods she most admired; Madame Bourdelais, wise and practical, took advantage of her opportunities and made use of the large establishment with the discretion of a good housekeeper, often thus securing great bargains; Henriette, who was really very elegant, only bought certain articles there, her gloves, hosiery and linen.

"We have other goods equally low in price," said Mouret, in his same musical voice. "I can recommend our *Cuir d'Or*, a taffeta of incomparable lustre. In fancy silks we have a wonderful assortment, and choice designs selected by our buyer from among thousands. As to velvets, we have the choicest shades. Cloths are to be greatly worn this season. You will see Cheviots, *Matelassés*, and other styles."

They did not interrupt him. They listened with an absorbed expression and a faint smile, with heads slightly outstretched toward the Tempter, who stood unmoved, calmly sipping his tea between each phrase. The air was heavy with the fragrance of this tea.

Baron Hartmann, quietly looking on, felt his admiration increase for this young man.

"They will wear cloth this winter, then?" asked Madame Marly, whose worn face lighted up with enthusiasm. "I really must have something of the kind."

Madame Bourdelais, whose serenity was undisturbed said, in her turn :

"I shall certainly see what you have—for my whole family is to be clothed."

And turning her pretty blonde head toward the mistress of the house, she asked :

"You always go to Sauveur, do you not?"

"Yes," answered Henriette, "I always go to her, for I think she is the only woman in Paris who knows how to cut a waist; and then, too, in spite of what Monsieur Mouret says, she has most original designs—designs unlike any one else, and I hate to see dresses precisely like my own worn by every second woman I meet."

Mouret smiled discreetly, and then he gave the group to understand that Madame Sauveur bought all her materials from his establishment. It is true that she might occasionally purchase from some manufacturer the whole of some one style. This might be so, he would not say to the contrary—but he knew for a certainty that all her black silks were obtained at the *Bonheur*; when especial bargains were offered, she laid in large supplies, and then doubled and quadrupled the price.

"I know," he added, "that she and other dress-

makers will sweep out all our *Paris Bonheur*, that is, if you ladies allow her to do so."

This was too much for these ladies. The idea of losing the bargain they had anticipated, exasperated them—for women as a rule find ten times the enjoyment in making a purchase when they believe themselves to be getting it under its value. A bargain is dear to the heart of a woman.

"But we intend to have many bargains for you, ladies," Mouret added, gayly, as he took up the fan belonging to Madame Desforges, that had been laid on a table.

"Now, look at this fan," he continued. "I have no idea what it cost."

"The chantilly was twenty-five francs, and the mounting two hundred."

"Indeed! Well, the chantilly was not dear; still, we have the same thing at eighteen francs. As to the mounting, dear lady, you have been abominably cheated. I will agree to furnish you with one precisely like it for ninety francs."

"I knew it!" cried Madame Bourdelais.

"Ninety francs!" murmured Madame Bovés, "a woman must be really without a sou in her pocket, to pass by a fan at that price!"

She was again examining the fan with her daughter Blanche, and on her large face with its regular features, and in her heavy lidded eyes there was an expression of envy and longing which she could not conceal.

A second time did the fan make the round of a

the ladies, to a chorus of remarks and exclamations. Monsieur de Boves and Vallegnose, in the meantime, had left the window. While the former placed himself behind Madame Guibal, the young man leaned over Blanche and endeavored to make himself agreeable to her.

"But is not that fan a little dismal looking?" he asked, "that white ivory with the black lace suggests mourning."

"Oh!" she answered gravely, "I saw one the other day that was much prettier—it was mother-of-pearl and white feathers."

Monsieur de Boves, who had probably noticed the envious eyes with which his wife followed the fan, said, quietly:

"Those things break very easily, do they not?"

"Don't speak of it!" cried Madame Guibal, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "I am quite worn out with having mine mended."

Madame Marly, greatly excited by this conversation, was nervously fingering the red leather bag on her knees. She had not yet shown her purchases, and she was wild to exhibit them. All at once she seemed to forget her husband, and opening her bag with an abrupt snap of the spring, she pulled out a card on which was wound several yards of narrow lace.

"Look at this Valenciennes for my daughter," she said. "Is it not wonderful for one franc ninety?"

The ladies exclaimed in surprise, and Mouret said that he had given orders that all such remnants should be sold at cost.

Madame Marly closed her bag as if to say she should show nothing more. But after the success of the Valenciennes, she could not resist pulling out a handkerchief.

"Brussels *appliqué*, my dear—and only twenty francs!"

The bag seemed inexhaustible. She colored and laughed with each article she showed. There was a neck-tie of Spanish blonde at thirty francs. She did not want it particularly, but the clerk had sworn that it was the last at that price. Then there was a *Chantilly* veil; a little dear—fifty francs, but if she did not wear it herself, she could make something of it for her daughter. "I adore laces!" she said, with her nervous little laugh, "and when I am in a shop I feel as if I must buy every inch in it!"

"And what is this?" asked Madame de Boves, taking up some guipure.

"That? oh! it is an inserting—thirty yards, at a franc a yard."

"Good gracious!" said Madame Bourdelais, "what on earth can you do with it?"

"I am sure I don't know. I got it because the design was so peculiar."

At this moment she lifted her eyes and beheld the horrified face of her husband. He was paler than ever, and his whole person expressed the resigned anguish of a poor man who looks on at the wilful throwing away of money earned with such infinite toil and trouble. Each bit of lace was to him a new disaster—emblematic of long, weary hours at his desk, of walks

through mud and rain, of the constant strain made on his energies by the demands of a needy household.

When his wife caught his eyes, she tried to gather up the handkerchief, cravat and veil, and as her feverish hands hovered over these things, she said, with one of her nervous, uncomfortable laughs :

"You have caused me to be scolded by my husband, but I assure you," she added, addressing Monsieur Marly, "that I have really been very reasonable. I saw some round point at five hundred francs. Oh! it was simply wonderful!"

"Why did you not buy it?" asked Madame Guibal, quietly. "Monsieur Marly is the most gallant of men."

The Professor ought to have bowed low at this compliment, and should have said that his wife could have made such purchases as she pleased. But the thought of the danger he had escaped, sent a cold chill down his back, and as Mouret had just said that great shops like his own added to the comfort of all homes, he darted at him a reproachful glance in which was the furtive hatred of a timid man.

The ladies in the meantime had not relinquished the laces. They unrolled and fingered them, and plaited them in little folds. They questioned Mouret more eagerly than before. He bent over them in the gathering darkness, his beard touching their hair at times, but he was still their master in spite of the feminine excitement he feigned.

"Oh! Monsieur Mouret! Monsieur Mouret!" murmured the voices of these women, who seemed to regard the young man as the monarch of feminine fripperies.

The white lace lay like snow on the knees of these devoted worshipers, a fiery gleam came from the spirit lamp under the tea-kettle, and the fragrance of tea filled the room.

Suddenly a servant entered with lamps, and the charm was broken. The *salon* was transformed—all was bright and gay. Madame Marly closed her bag on her treasures, Madame de Boves began to eat a *baba*, while Henriette, standing a little apart, was talking in a low voice with the Baron.

"He is charming!" said the Baron.

"Is he not?" she cried, involuntarily.

He smiled upon her with paternal indulgence. It was the first time he had believed her really in love, and he felt a certain compassion when he thought of her, as at the mercy of this cold-hearted man whose character he had correctly read.

He thought it his duty to warn her, and murmured, in a half jesting tone:

"Look out, my dear; he has absolutely no heart. He will eat you one of these days!"

Henriette's beautiful eyes flashed. She understood of course that Mouret had simply made use of her to approach the Baron. And she swore to herself that this man, to whom her love was but an episode in his hurried business career, should yet adore her madly, but she answered the Baron with a smile, affecting to jest in her turn.

"Ah! it is always the lamb who ends by eating the wolf, you know!"

Greatly amused, the Baron nodded encouragingly

Perhaps, after all, she was the woman who would avenge the wrongs of the rest of her sex.

When Mouret, after reminding Vallegnose that he wished to show him his whole establishment, went to take leave, the Baron led him into the recess of the window looking out upon the dark garden. There they talked together for some minutes in low voices. Then the Banker said:

"Very well, I will look into the matter. My decision will be in your favor, if your opening next Monday is what it now promises to be."

They shook hands, and Mouret, greatly pleased, departed. He returned to the *Bonheur*, for he never dined well unless he had satisfied himself as to the receipts of the day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE eventful Monday, October 10th, arrived. The sun dissipated the clouds that for a week had hung over the city of Paris. It had rained all night, but the wind that carried away the clouds had also dried the sidewalks, and the sky was as clear and blue as spring.

The *Bonheur des Dames* was in all its glory—everything was prepared for its winter opening, and its windows irradiated the street with its symphonies of colors. But the hour was as yet too early for customers, only a few busy housewives appeared who were anxious to avoid the crowd that was inevitable later in the day. On the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin and Place Gaillon, where the carriages were expected to stand, there was as yet only two *fiâcres*. The dwellers in that *Quartier*, especially the small shopkeepers, stood about at the corners indulging in bitter remarks to each other. These persons were especially indignant at the appearance in the Rue de la Michodière of four new wagons, painted red and picked out with yellow—their highly varnished sides glittered in the sunlight, showing the name of the house in large letters. One of these wagons, drawn by a superb horse, started off with packages which had been purchased after the last delivery of the previous day.

Baudu followed with eyes of hate this wagon which was to bear the detested name of the *Bonheur des Dames* all through Paris.

Several *flicres* now drove into the Place. Each time a customer entered the shop there was a general movement among the liveried servants drawn up under the high porch. Their livery was a coat and pantaloons of bright green, and vests of yellow and red stripes. Inspector Jouve wore a long coat and white cravat. He received the ladies with an air of grave courtesy, and pointed out to them the counters to which they desired to go.

Then the ladies passed on into the vestibule which, for that day, was transformed into an eastern *salon*.

This was a charming surprise which had originated in Mouret's mind. He had bought in the Levant in excellent condition, a collection of rugs both old and new, rugs which previously only curiosity shops had sold at all. Mouret proposed to inundate the market and sell them almost at the price he had paid for them, while at the same time he made of them an artistic and splendid decoration. This eastern *salon* could be seen from the Place Gaillon, draped with rugs and portières, under the skilful direction of Mouret. From the ceiling were stretched Smyrna rugs of complicated designs on red grounds, then around the four sides were portières—portières of Karamanie and Syria, in stripes of yellow, green and vermillion—and others more common and rough in texture. There were also rugs that could be used as window curtains, with strange arabesques, or rich with palms and peonies.

There was one large rug from Agra, a white ground and a pale blue border over which ran audaciously violet and purple arabesques. In every direction wonders met the eye, praying rugs from Daghestan and Mecca with the symbolic point, and in a corner were piles of low priced rugs from Coula and Kirchcen. This *salon*, or to speak more correctly this tent, was furnished with divans and chairs covered with saddlebags, some in velvet squares, others embroidered with flowers—Turkey, Arabia, Persia and the Indies were all represented. Palaces and Mosques had been sacked. Tawny gold was the predominant color, and the faded tints of the older rugs were as warm and rich as those of the old masters. And visions of Eastern splendor and luxury rose spontaneously in the brain amid all this barbaric luxury, and this strange mysterious odor which these woolens had brought from the land of the sun.

In the morning at eight o'clock, when Denise, who was to begin her engagement that day, had crossed the Oriental *salon* which we have tried to describe, she stood transfixed, hardly knowing where she was. One of the servants placed her in the hands of Madame Cabiou who had the charge of the chambers. She was given No. 7, where her trunk had been already placed. It was a narrow cell under a Mansard roof; the furniture consisted of a little bed, a wardrobe, dressing-table and two chairs. Twenty similar cells were on a long corridor, and of the thirty-five girls who were employed in two departments of the *Bonheur*, the twenty who had no families in Paris slept there. The fifteen others

lodged out with aunts or cousins borrowed for the occasion.

Denise at once hastened to remove her well-brushed shabby gown, the only one she had brought from Valognes. Then she dressed herself in the uniform of the cloak room, a black silk that lay ready for her on the bed. The dress was too large for her, but her haste was so great and her emotion so extreme that she did not even notice this fact. She had never before worn silk, and as she descended the stairs and the light fell on her shining skirts, and she heard the rustle of the folds, she felt almost ashamed. As she entered the cloak room she heard a quarrel going on.

Clara was saying in a sharp voice: "I was here first, Madame."

"It is not true," answered Margu rite, "she hustled me away from the door, but my foot was already in the *salon*."

They were talking of the slate on which the saleswomen inscribed their names in the order of their arrival, and whenever any of them had a customer she placed her name under her own.

Madame Aur lie sided with Margu rite.

"Unjust as usual!" muttered Clara, angrily. But the appearance of Denise reconciled these young ladies. They looked at her and exchanged a smile. The new comer went up to the slate and wrote her name, which was the last.

Madame Aur lie watched her uneasily, and finally could not refrain from saying:

"My dear, two of you could be put in that waist."

It must be altered to fit you. Then too you do not know how to dress yourself, come here that I may fix you a little."

And Madame Aurélie led the girl to one of the long mirrors which alternated with the doors of the wardrobe, in which were kept the cloaks and wraps. The enormous room, carpeted with a red Moquette, and surrounded with mirrors, looked like a *salon* in a Hôtel, through which hundreds of persons daily pass. The saleswomen moved up and down; they never seated themselves on the few chairs reserved for customers. They each had thrust between two of the buttons in the front of their dresses, a long pencil, and from their pockets emerged the white leaves of their books. Several of these girls indulged in rings, watches and chains, but their greatest coquetry, in the enforced uniformity of their toilette, was in the careful arrangement of their hair, which was puffed and braided and increased by artificial additions, if nature had not liberally supplied them.

"Draw the belt further over," said Madame Aurélie. "There! that takes away the wrinkles behind, at all events. And your hair, it is superb. How can you treat it in this way?"

Her hair was, indeed, the girl's only beauty. Very fair—the true *blonde cendré*—it fell to her knees in heavy masses. When she did it up her only idea was to roll it as compactly as possible, and hold it with a strong horn comb. Clara did not approve of this magnificent hair, and laughed ostentatiously at the awkward manner in which it was dressed. She

beckoned to her side a saleswoman in the *lingerie* department, a girl with a large face and pleasant expression. The two departments were often at open war, but they occasionally fraternized to ridicule some poor unfortunate.

"Mademoiselle Pauline, do you see that mane?" said Clara, while Margu rite feigned to be dying of laughter.

Pauline was not inclined to join in this mockery. She looked at Denise, and remembered what she had suffered herself the first month she had been in those rooms.

"Well! what of it?" she said; "it is a pity that we have not manes like it!"

And she went back to her counter, leaving the two others feeling very uncomfortable. Denise, who had heard it all, followed her with a look of gratitude, while Madame Aur lie gave her a book and said:

"To-morrow you will arrange yourself better. And now, try to do the best you can. This will be a hard day for you, but you can show your capabilities."

Few customers came up to the cloak room at this early hour, and the saleswomen nursed themselves for the fatigues of the afternoon.

Denise, in order to do something, cut her pencil, nad in imitation of the others, thrust it between two of the buttons of her waist. She exhorted herself to take courage—it was necessary that she should be mistress of the situation. The previous evening she had been informed that she could take the situation without a fixed salary at first, and with only the com-

mission on the sales she should make. But she hoped soon to receive twelve hundred francs, and even aspired in the future to two thousand, which she knew good saleswomen could obtain when they took pains. One hundred francs per month would permit her to pay Pépé's board and to clothe Jean, who did not receive a sou. She could live with an occasional purchase of clothing and linen. To gain this hundred francs per month, however, she must show herself strong and courageous—she must learn not to heed the ill-natured remarks around her, but to hold her own and take her share of the customers who entered the room. As she stood thus reasoning with herself, a tall young man passed through the room and smiled at her; she recognized Deloche, who had been received into the lace department the evening before; she returned the smile, happy in this friendly greeting, which seemed to be a good omen. At half-past nine a bell rang for the first breakfast, a little later there was another bell and another breakfast—and yet no customers appeared. Madame Frédéric, in the grim austerity of her widowhood, was rather pleased at the idea of a disaster, and declared that the day was lost—they might as well lock the wardrobes and go away. These words dispirited Marguérite, while Clara wondered, if the establishment failed, if she should be able to join the party to the Bois de Verrières. As to Madame Aurélie, silent and grave, she paraded the room like a general on whom rests the responsibility of victory or defeat.

About eleven o'clock, several ladies appeared. It

was for Denise to advance, it was her turn to wait on a customer.

"The milkmaid, if you please—step back for the milkmaid!" murmured Marguérite.

The customer was a woman of about forty-five, who had come from some distant Province. She had been hoarding every sou for some time, and as soon as she reached Paris she hastened from the train to the *Bonheur des Dames*. She never sent for the things she required by letter for she liked, she said, to use her eyes. She bought everything, and every clerk in the establishment knew her, and knew that her name was Madame Bontarel, and that she lived at Albi, but they troubled themselves no further about her.

"You are well, I trust, Madame?" asked Madame Aurélie, who advanced graciously. "And what will you have?"

Then, turning:

"Young ladies!" she said.

Denise obeyed the summons, but Clara anticipated her. Generally, Clara was indolent, and made little exertion to secure customers, as she made more money outside and with less fatigue. But the idea of depriving the new shop girl of a good customer spurred her on.

"Excuse me, it is my turn," said Denise, indignantly.

Madame Aurélie looked at her disapprovingly and said, in a low but severe voice:

"There is no turn. I am sole mistress here, if you please."

The girl fell back, and as tears rose to her eyes she

turned her back to conceal them. Did they intend to prevent her from selling? Did they all mean to play into each other's hands? A sudden fear of the future assailed her, and looking into the street she saw her uncle's sign just opposite. She wished she had implored him to keep her—perhaps he would have yielded to her entreaties, for he seemed quite touched as he talked to her the previous evening. Here she was alone in this great place where no one loved her. Pépé and Jean were among strangers—these two boys who had never before left her side. The street was suddenly obscured, and she saw her uncle's sign through a mist of tears.

Behind her, all this time, there was a murmur of voices.

"It is too tight," said Madame Bontarel.

"Oh! no, Madame, you are mistaken," said Clara. "The shoulders fit to perfection, but perhaps you would prefer a pelisse to a mantle."

Denise started. A hand was laid on her arm, and Madame Aurélie said, sharply:

"This will never do! Do you propose to spend the morning looking into the street?"

"You told me that I could not sell, Madame."

"There is other work for you, however. Begin with the beginning. You must fold the garments and replace them in the wardrobes."

Then Madame turned away, while Denise, without a word, went to the two long oak tables where lay the garments of all shapes and sizes which had been taken out to please fastidious customers. The girl began

fold them and place them in the wardrobes where they belonged. This was the work usually given to *débütantes*. Denise felt that the first thing required of her was passive, unquestioning obedience until the forewoman should allow her to sell, as at first she had seemed inclined to do.

Denise was busy in this way when Mouret appeared. She started and colored without knowing why. She felt the same strange fear, the same sinking of the heart when she thought he was going to speak to her. But he did not even see her; he had forgotten the impression she had made on him.

"Madame Aurélie!" he called, abruptly.

He was paler than usual, but his eyes were clear and decided. He had been through the entire establishment and, startled to find them empty, had been assailed by a sudden fear of defeat. It was true that the clock had just struck eleven, and he knew by experience that a crowd never arrived until afternoon. But certain trifling indications disturbed him. On other opening days there had always been more people early in the morning. Like all great captains on the eve of a decisive battle, a superstitious weakness had assailed him. If he failed to-day he was ruined, and he could not have told why: he thought he read his defeat on the faces of all about him.

At this moment Madame Bontarel, she who always bought, went away, saying:

"You have nothing that pleases me. I will look about a little and decide."

Mouret watched her as she went away. Then, as

Madame Aurélie hurried toward him at his summons, he led her aside; the two exchanged a few rapid words. She shrugged her shoulders despairingly and the two stood face to face, stunned by that fear which generals hide from their men. Then he said aloud:

"If you need assistance, take in a girl from the work-room. She will be of some use." He continued his inspection morosely. He had avoided Bourdoucle all the morning; he did not wish to hear his own doubts put into words.

On leaving the *lingerie* department, where trade was utterly stagnant, he met him face to face, and was compelled to listen to all Bourdoucle's moans and fears. At last Mouret bade him hold his tongue and go to the devil, with a brutality which, in certain moods, he was quite ready to shower upon those under him.

"I tell you," he said, "all will go well; and cowards had best take themselves away!"

Mouret took his stand at the foot of the stairs. From this point he could overlook the whole lower floor. The great void and quiet were intensely depressing. At the lace counter an old lady had had all the boxes pulled down, and had gone away without buying anything, while three young women at the *lingerie* counter were selecting each a collar at fifteen sous. But at the extreme end of the shop Mouret noticed that there were many more people.

The shop-boys in their uniforms, on which glittered large brass buttons, waited for people to come with visible impatience. One of the Inspectors would occa-

sionally pass, stiff and erect in his white cravat, and Mouret's heart sank within him at the stillness. Carriages were certainly driving up, for doors were shut violently. But the cashiers were idle behind their wickets, and the tables on which packages were tied up and from whence all goods were sent out, were bare and guiltless of any bundles.

Mouret, vexed at himself for having had any fears, now began to feel that his machine would soon begin to work.

"Look here, Favier," murmured Hutten, "look at the master; it strikes me that he has not a very festive expression!"

"I am utterly disgusted," answered Favier. "I have not sold a penny's worth to-day!"

These two men, as they kept their eyes open for customers, uttered disconnected phrases from time to time, without looking at each other.

Several salesmen under the direction of Robineau, were bringing out huge pieces of "*Paris Bonheur*," while Bouthemont seemed to be receiving an important order from a thin young woman, with whom he was holding a whispered conference. On *étagères* were piled silks in long covers of cream colored paper, and on the counters lay moires, satins and velvets of all colors and shades.

"I want a hundred francs for Sunday," said Hutten, "and if I don't make twelve francs to-day, I am lost. I relied on this opening!"

"A hundred francs, indeed!" answered Favier, "you are modest! If I make sixty or seventy, I am satisfied."

Why must you have one hundred francs by that time !”

“Because I was fool enough to make a bet. I lost it, and must dine five persons—two men and three women. Zounds! I will cut off twenty-five yards of the ‘*Paris Bonheur*’ for the first woman who passes!”

They talked of what they had done the previous evening, and of what they would do during the next week. Favier wanted to go to the races; Hutten preferred the singers of the *café concert*. But the same desire for money inspired them both. They seemed to think of little less. They struggled for it from Monday morning until Saturday night, and then spent all they could get on Sunday.

Bouthemont had received from Madame Sauveur, the thin woman with whom he had been talking, a very large order—two or three dozen pieces of the “*Paris Bonheur*.”

“On my word, this is too much!” muttered Hutten, who profited by the smallest trifles to embitter his fellow clerks against the man whose position he coveted. “In my opinion neither the first nor second clerks ought to sell, and upon my honor, if I ever become second clerk you will see how I will act toward you.”

And his plump little face and form were radiant with good nature. Favier gave him one sarcastic glance, but restraining his bile he said :

“Yes, of course. I don’t doubt it.”

Then as a lady approached he added in a lower voice.

“Attention ! Here comes some one to you.”

The lady wore a yellow bonnet and a red dress. Hutten instantly divined with his wonderful instinct that the woman would buy nothing. He stooped down behind the counter and pretended to tie his shoe string, and murmured to his companion while in this position.

"Thank you, no. I don't propose to lose my time for her!"

Meanwhile Robineau called him.

"Huten! Where is Hutten?"

And as that individual did not reply, the salesman next in turn, received the lady. She merely asked for samples with prices, but detained the salesman more than twenty minutes. Presently Robineau saw Hutten rise from behind the counter, and when a new customer appeared, Robineau interfered and prevented the young man from stepping forward.

"You have lost your turn," he said in a severe tone, "I called you and as you were behind the counter, I—"

"But I did not hear."

"Enough. Favier, it is your turn."

With a look, Favier, who was really greatly amused, apologized to his friend who turned away pale with rage. He was all the more indignant because he knew the customer, an excessively pretty woman who constantly appeared at his counter, and was known to all the salesmen as "the blonde." They had none of them heard her name or knew where she lived. She bought largely, had her purchases placed in her carriage and disappeared. Tall and elegant, dressed always in perfect taste, she seemed to be wealthy and fashionable.

"Well? And your *cocotte*, what did she buy to

day?" asked Hutten when Favier returned from the cashier's desk where he had accompanied the lady.

"Oh! she is no *cocotte*, she is the wife of a banker or a physician, or something of that kind."

"Nonsense! she is a *cocotte*; those creatures nowadays put on the most tremendous airs of propriety!"

Favier was writing in his book.

"Never mind what she is. The things she bought amounted to two hundred and ninety-three francs, and that will give me three francs."

Hutten shut his lips very closely together, and then began to grumble about the new book, which was a senseless bother, he said.

Between these men there was a perpetual conflict in a quiet way. Favier as a rule pretended to recognize Hutten's superiority, while in reality he scoffed at his pretensions. Hutten was intensely indignant that he should be robbed, as he considered it, of the three francs, for he regarded this lady as his especial property.

"A nice way this is, to be sure!" he muttered, "if it goes on I shall not make enough to give even Seltzer water to my friends!"

He watched the head clerk of his counter as he conducted Madame Sauveur to the door, and heard him say:

"Very good. Tell him then that I will do my best to obtain this favor from Monsieur Mouret."

Mouret had long since disappeared from the position he had occupied on the stairs. Suddenly he was seen again in the same place. His face had brightened

wonderfully, for his confidence in himself had returned. The shop was gradually becoming crowded. He had despaired for a moment. The disastrous morning, due to a heavy shower that had fallen between nine and ten o'clock, might yet be repaired, for blue sky and sunshine were again to be seen. Mouret was reassured by the sight of the different rooms, the lace and shawl Departments were packed. In the silk room, ladies had taken off their gloves that they might test the quality of the "*Paris Bonheur*," while talking together as if in a drawing-room. He heard the constant roll of carriages stopping at his door, and bustle and stir from the basement to the attic. Inspector Jouve walked up and down the shop, looking out for pickpockets.

"Hollo! is that you?" said Mouret, as he recognized Paul de Vallegnose, who had made his way to him with the assistance of one of the liveried shop boys. "No, you do not disturb me in the least; and besides, you could not have selected a better day to watch the working of my machine, for I must be everywhere and you can follow me."

Mouret was not without anxiety even yet. There was a crowd to be sure, but would the sales be large in proportion—that was the point.

Nevertheless he laughed with Paul, and seemed to be in the best of spirits.

"Things look better," said Hutten, "but I have no luck to-day—look there now!"

And he made a little motion with his chin toward a lady who was going away after a disgusted look at all the goods she had seen.

Generally, Hutten made large sales, and invariably received a larger percentage than Favier, and now this fellow, as he mentally stigmatized him, was taking everything, for he saw him now measuring off a dress. It was perfectly exasperating!

He suddenly exclaimed :

"Do you know Madame Desforges, the fair friend of our employer? That is she at the glove counter—the brunette, I mean, on whom Mignol is waiting."

He was silent for a moment, and then spoke again as if addressing Mignol :

"Go on, go on, squeeze her hand hard; I know all your ways and what your conquests amount to."

Between himself and Mignol there was the rivalry of handsome men who both claimed to have little flirtations with their customers. But in reality they had nothing to boast of. Mignol told a pretty story of the wife of a police commissioner who had fallen desperately in love with him, while Hutten professed to have had a similar experience; but they both lied. They wished to be believed that countesses made rendezvous with them between two purchases, or while waiting for the change.

A long row of ladies were seated before the narrow glove counter covered with green velvet. Smiling clerks were opening flat boxes of a delicate rose color, which they took from drawers under the counter itself. Mignol, with his suave Parisian ways, had already made large sales. Madame Desforges had bought a dozen pair of long kid gloves—*Bonheur* gloves, a specialty of the house. She then took three

pair of *gants de Suède*. And now she was trying on a pair of *gants de Saxe*.

"Oh! it is perfection, Madame!" said Mignol. "Six and three-quarters would be too large for a hand like yours!"

Half lying on the counter he held her hand, pushing on the fingers one by one with a lingering, caressing movement, looking in her face with a tender expression in his handsome eyes. But she, with her elbow resting on the velvet, surrendered her hand to him with as tranquil an air as she would have given her foot to her maid to have her boot buttoned. She did not think of him as a man, but as a servant, and with her usual disdain did not even look at him.

"I am not hurting you, Madame, I hope?"

She shook her head. She liked the odor of gloves *de Saxe*, and often laughed when she acknowledged her predilection for this equivocal perfume; she was thinking of her gloves, and not of the man who was putting them on.

"And now what else, Madame?"

"Nothing, thanks. Please send this package to cashier No. 10, for Madame Desforges."

An habitu  of the house, she was in the habit of sending all her packages to the desk of one of the cashiers.

When she went away, Mignol winked as he looked after her, and then turning to the clerk next him, wishing to make him suppose that something extraordinary had taken place, he muttered some insolent remark in a low voice.

Madame Desforges continued her purchases. She went to the left and bought some towels, then went on to the woolens under the gallery. She happened to be particularly pleased with her cook, and wished to make her a present of a dress.

This department was crowded with all the women of the neighborhood; they were feeling the various stuffs and making silent calculations. She took her seat at one of the counters already piled high with pieces of goods that the salesmen had one by one placed there at the expense of considerable muscular exertion. There were iron grays, and steel grays, blue grays and all tints of brown; bright plaids made an agreeable variety, and the white tickets on these pieces looked like the first flakes of snow falling on the black and frozen December soil.

Liénard was jesting with a good looking seamstress behind a pile of poplin; the woman had been sent by her mistress to match a bit of merino. Liénard hated these "openings" when his arms, as he said, were nearly wrenched from their sockets, and he never made the smallest effort to sell, doing just enough to save being dismissed.

"Listen Miss Fanny," he said, "you are always in such a hurry. How did that vigogne make up the other day?"

But the woman made her escape with a laugh, and Liénard turning suddenly found himself face to face with Madame Desforges. He was obliged to say to her: "What can I do for you, Madame?"

"She wanted an inexpensive dress," she said, "he

it must be good." Liénard, who thought much of his arms, manœuvred to make her take something that was already on the counter. He swore there was nothing better in the house than these cashmeres, vigognes and serges; that there was no wear out to them. But none of these fabrics seemed to suit her. She saw high up a plaid she fancied. He was obliged to pull it down, and she pronounced it too coarse. Then she looked at cheviots, diagonals, all of which she fingered and examined. The young man's back and arms were nearly broken, and the counter had entirely disappeared. Finally, with no intention of buying, she asked to see grenadines and *Gaze de Chambery*. When she had indulged in this amusement long enough she said, "Oh! the first thing I saw will do as well as another. It is only for my cook. Give me the serge with the small figures upon it, the one at two francs."

And as Liénard gave an angry jerk with his yard stick, she added:

"Send it to cashier No. 10, for Madame Desforges." As she moved away she recognized Madame Marly who was accompanied by her daughter, Valentine, a tall girl of fourteen, sharp featured and bold, who already looked at the pretty things in the shop with the covetous eyes of a woman.

"Ah! It is you, then, dear Madame."

"Yes, it is I. And did you ever know such a crowd?"

"Don't speak of it. It is really dreadful. But an immense success! Have you seen the Oriental room?"

"Superb! wonderful!"

And knocked and elbowed as they stood, the ladies still maintained their ground, and began to talk of the cheapness and beauty of the rugs.

Then Madame Marly went on to say that she was looking for the material for a wrap. She could find nothing she liked; she had thought of a matelassé cloth.

"Too common, mamma," murmured Valentine.

"Let us go into the silk department," said Madame Desforges; "we ought to look at these famous black silks, the '*Paris Bonheur*.'"

Madame Marly hesitated, for she had solemnly promised her husband to commit no extravagances. She had been buying a great deal—ruches and a muff for herself, and stockings for her daughter.

She said to the clerk who was showing her the cloth matelassé:

"No! I will go to the Department."

The clerk took her purchases and preceded the ladies.

The silk Department was jammed. There was an especial crush before the display arranged by Hutten, to which Mouret had given the finishing touches of a master-hand. Light satins and silks—with the cool, transparent shadows of running water. Nile green, Danube blue, May rose and violet. Then there were satins richer and stronger in hue, and below were heaped damasks and brocades, with velvets of every color. Women with faces pale with envy, bent over them or stood gazing at this cataract with r

dull fear of being swept away or with an irresistible impulse to throw themselves into it and be forever lost.

"You here, too?" said Madame Desforges, as she saw Madame Bourdelais seated before a counter.

"Ah! good morning!" replied that lady, extending her hand to her two friends. "Yes, I came to see what was to be seen here to-day."

"Is it not wonderful? Was there ever such a display? And have you seen the Eastern *salon*?"

"Extraordinary!"

But under all this half-affected enthusiasm, Madame Bourdelais retained her self-possession and never lost her clear head. She carefully examined the piece of "*Paris Bonheur*" which was shown to her, for she had come to the establishment to purchase a costume from this silk, if on seeing it she concluded it to be really a bargain. She was pleased, for she at once asked for thirty yards, thinking with this amount she could make a dress for herself and a *paletôt* for her little girl.

"Are you going already?" asked Madame Desforges. "Can't you go about a little with us?"

"No, thanks, I am needed at home. I did not dare bring any of the children into this crowd."

And she went off, preceded by the salesman, who took her and her thirty yards of silk to Cashier No. 10, where young Albert had lost his head amid the demands made upon his arithmetical abilities. When the salesman could approach the desk, he made a note of the sale on his book, and the cashier inscribed it on his Register, and the leaf, detached from the book was placed on a sharp point of metal standing on the desk.

"One hundred and forty francs," said Albert.

Madame Bourdelais paid and gave her address, for she was on foot. Behind the cashier's desk was Joseph, already placing the silk in paper; when this was done, it was placed in a large basket with other bundles, and sent to the lower floor through the slide.

The pressure, meanwhile, was so great at the silk counter, that Madame Desforges and Madame Marly could not for some time find a clerk at liberty to wait on them.

It was evident that the "*Paris Bonheur*" was an immense success—one of those sudden fancies had been aroused which so often settles a fashion. All the salesmen were busy measuring off this silk with a great rustle, while the click of scissors and the peculiar sound they made as they cut the material, rose above all the voices.

"It is certainly very good for five francs sixty," said Madame Desforges, who had finally succeeded in getting hold of a piece.

Madame Marly and her daughter were suddenly disenchanted. The newspapers had said so much about this silk, that they expected something much heavier and more lustrous.

But Bouthemont had recognized Madame Desforges, and in order to pay his court to a lady who was believed to be all-powerful with his employer, advanced with his somewhat vulgar smile.

No one waiting upon her! Such negligence was unpardonable! She must really be a little indulgent, for there was so much to be done. As he spoke he

looked for a chair and laughed; his somewhat familiar manner did not seem to displease Henriette.

"Look at Bouthemont!" said Favier, as he took down a box of velvets from behind Hutten.

Hutten had forgotten Madame Desforges—he had lost his temper entirely over an old lady who kept him a quarter of an hour, and ended by buying a yard and a quarter of satin. When there was a great crowd, regular succession in the order of the clerks was impossible, of course, and he was about waiting on Madame Bontarel, who, after spending three hours in the morning at the *Bonheur*, had returned in the afternoon, when Favier spoke.

Hutten started—he was determined to say something to this lady, who was his employer's friend. And then, too, he had sold almost nothing all day.

Bouthemont, at this moment said, loudly:

"This way, gentlemen. Some one is needed here!"

Hutten at once passed Madame Bontarel over to Robineau, who happened to be unoccupied.

"This gentleman," he said to Madame Bontarel, "will wait upon you better than I." And he hastened away. His usual delicate intuition seemed to have deserted him entirely that day, for usually whenever he looked at a customer he seemed to know what she would buy, and how much. He hurried his customers and knew better than themselves what they wanted.

He bowed low before Madame Desforges, and said, in his blandest tone:

"What kind of silk shall I show you, Madame?"

Madame Desforbes had scarcely opened her lips, when he went on—

"I know, I have precisely what you require!"

When the piece of "*Paris Bonheur*" was unfolded on a corner of the counter, Madame Marly and her daughter came up. Hutten was a little distracted, for he saw that the last lady would probably be the purchaser.

A few words were exchanged; Madame Desforbes was advising her friend.

"Ah! of course," she said, "you can't expect silk at five francs sixty to be equal to silk at fifteen, or even at ten."

"It is certainly thin," answered Madame Marly, "and I greatly fear it has not body enough for a mantle."

This remark enabled the clerk to interfere; he smiled, and with the exaggerated courtesy of a man who is never mistaken, said:

"But, Madame, softness is the especial quality of this silk. It never tumbles. It is, in fact, precisely what you require."

Impressed by his assurance, these ladies said no more. They took up the silk and examined it again. Suddenly they found themselves pulled by the sleeve. It was Madame Guibal, who, for an hour, had been roaming through the shop, feasting her eyes on all the delightful things it contained, but without buying a yard of calico—and there was another outburst of enthusiasm.

"What! is it you?"

"Yes, it is I! Was there ever such a crowd?"

"Never. Have you seen the Eastern *salon*?"

"Beautiful!"

"Such a success! Wait a moment here and we will go up stairs together."

"No thanks, I have just come from there."

Huten waited, concealing his impatience under his habitual smile. How long did they propose to detain him? They were literally stealing his money just as much as if they put their hands into his pocket. Madame Guibal finally went off, continuing her slow promenade.

"If I were in your place, I should buy my mantle ready made," said Madame Desforges, returning to the "*Paris Bonheur*." "It will really be more economical."

"With the trimmings and the making," murmured Madame Marly. "Then too, one has a better choice."

The three ladies turned away and Madame Desforges addressing Huten, said: "Will you show us where to find cloaks and mantles?"

Huten was positively stunned, for he was not accustomed to such defeats. What! the brunette did not mean to buy anything? Had his usual acuteness fled forever? He abandoned Madame Marly entirely and devoted himself to Henriette. It was with his most enticing manner that he said:

"Can I not show you our satins, our velvets? We have some extraordinary bargains."

"Thanks, another time," she answered, not looking at him.

Huten was obliged to show the ladies to the cloak department, and in doing so suffered agonies in seeing Robineau measuring off a huge quantity of silk for Madame Bontarel.

It was plain that he would not make four sous that day, and in a voice of suppressed rage, though still with a smile, he said at the stairs:

"The next floor, ladies."

But to ascend the stairs was a work of time and difficulty, for the crowd had become positively fearful and the run on the "*Paris Bonheur*," employed every available clerk.

Henriette was positively frightened, but looking up she beheld Mouret at the top of the stairs. If he left this position it was only to return to it, for it was here that he realized his victory most fully. She smiled up to him, hoping that he would come down and assist her. But he could not distinguish her face in the surging mass below, and was besides busy in showing Vallegnose the different parts of the establishment. The heat had become intense and the noise within drowned all the noise without; there was the rattle of gold and silver at the cashier's desk, the same words continually repeated, the rustle of paper as the packages were done up and the dull thud as they were thrown into the slide.

The whole scene seemed moreover to be veiled in mist, for a fine dust filled the shop, a gleam of sunshine came in at the window on the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, and was like a golden arrow seen through a snow storm. In front of the glove counter was a struggling

crowd of human beings; no toilette was distinguishable. A few hats worn by men made dark spots, and the faces of the women were colorless from fatigue and heat, and assumed something of the transparency of a camelia.

Finally, thanks to his vigorous elbows, Hutten opened a path for the ladies, but when Henriette reached the top of the stairs Mouret had vanished with Vallegnose.

"Turn to your left, ladies," Hutten had said.

Above stairs the crowd was equally great, the shawl and fur rooms were impassable, and as the ladies went through the lace department they saw Madame Boves with her daughter Héloïse, bending over the articles Deloche was showing them.

"Good morning, I was thinking of you."

"And I was looking for you, but of course it was foolish to expect to find you in a crowd like this!"

"Magnificent, is it not?"

"Dazzling, my dear, perfectly dazzling!"

"You are buying, I see."

"No, only looking at things. It rests us to find seats occasionally."

In fact Madame de Boves who had in her pocket only money enough to pay for her carriage, had been shown all sorts of laces merely that she might enjoy the pleasure of looking at and touching them. She instantly knew that Deloche was inexperienced and awkward, and would never rebel against the caprices of his customers; she therefore took advantage of his timid complaisance and had kept him waiting upon her for a full half hour. She fingered the laces, plunged

her hands into the masses of Chantilly and Valenciennes, her eyes filled with envy and longing, while Blanche, young as she was, was pale with the same emotion. Meanwhile the conversation continued; Hutten could have slapped the ladies as he stood there awaiting their good pleasure.

"Ah!" said Madame Marly, "you are looking at those cravats and handkerchiefs like those I showed you the other day."

It was true, for Madame de Boves had been tormented by the laces of Madame Marly ever since Saturday, and could not resist coming to the *Bonheur*, although her husband's poverty prevented her from taking any of its treasures away with her.

She colored slightly and said that Blanche wanted one of the Spanish lace cravats. Then she added:

"You are going to the cloak room? Have you seen the Eastern *salon*?"

"Yes; superb, is it not?"

They separated at last, and Deloche, glad to be occupied, brought out another box of lace to show to the mother and daughter.

All this time, Inspector Jouve was marching up and down with his fierce moustache and military air, proudly wearing a decoration on his breast, and mounting guard over this precious and delicate merchandise which could be so easily concealed under a cloak or in a sleeve. When he passed Madame de Boves, he was surprised to see her with both hands plunged into a pile of rich lace, and he made up his mind to see what she was about.

"To the right, ladies," said Hutten, resuming his slow progress.

He with difficulty kept his temper. Was it not enough for him to lose all sales below, but now they must stop at every counter in the shop.

"Miss Clara!" said Hutten, in an angry tone, as soon as he was fairly within the cloak department.

But she did not hear him, for she was busy with a customer. The room was full: a long procession of people came in and went out, either into the lace room or into the *lingerie* department opposite. Ladies were trying on garments in front of the long mirrors. The soft carpet deadened every footfall, and the noise from the shop below reached this comparatively secluded place merely in the form of a distant murmur.

"Miss Marguérite!" cried Hutten, and as she did not stop any more than Miss Clara had done, he muttered between his teeth, taking care, however, that he was not heard:

"Confounded fools!"

He was in a wretched mood. In the first place he was tired, and then he was greatly galled by being detained in this way and so losing every chance of making money down stairs. And he was furious at being required to bring to these women in the cloak room, no one of whom he liked, customers who would put money in their pockets. There was a constant warfare kept up between these women and himself—in their mutual desire for gain, the difference of sex was lost sight of.

"Is there nobody here?" asked Hutten.

Then suddenly seeing Denise, he ran to her, crying: "Please attend to these ladies at once."

Denise had done nothing all day but fold and unfold various mantles and cloaks, and was now occupied in replacing an enormous pile in the wardrobes where they belonged.

As soon as Hutten had gotten rid of the ladies he had brought up stairs, his smiles returned, and with them a sarcastic expression at the idea of the embarrassment he had caused both the ladies and young girl whose inexperience he overrated.

Denise, in the meantime, was greatly moved by this unexpected stroke of good luck. For the second time he appeared to her like an unknown benefactor—fraternal and kind, always ready to come to her assistance. Her eyes were dewy with gratitude. She followed him with a long, lingering gaze, while he elbowed his way through the crowd, struggling to return to his counter with all possible speed.

"I should like to see some cloaks," said Madame Marly.

Then Denise asked what style of mantle she wanted, but the lady could not tell her. She had no idea, and the young girl, weary and bewildered, lost her head. She did not yet know where to find the various styles, and she stood hesitating when Madame Aurélie suddenly appeared. She had seen Madame Desforges from a distance, and knowing the *liaison* between that lady and Mouret, hurried across the room to serve her.

"Is any one waiting on you, ladies?" she asked.

"Yes, this young lady is trying to find what we

want, but she does not seem to know precisely what to do."

The forewoman paralyzed Denise by saying to her in a low voice:

"You see that every one realizes your ignorance. Keep still, I beg of you."

Then calling:

"Miss Marguérite, bring a mantle here."

Madame Aurélie remained while Marguérite showed the various styles. This girl was always as supercilious and offensive in her manner as she dared to be, and now when she heard Madame Marly say that she did not wish to give over two hundred francs, she looked utterly disdainful.

"Oh! it would be impossible to find anything in the least degree suitable for two hundred francs."

And she tossed on the counter a pile of very ordinary mantles, with a gesture that spoke volumes.

Madame Marly did not venture to approve of any. She turned to Madame Desforges and whispered in her ear:

"Don't you prefer to be waited upon by men?"

Finally Marguérite brought a mantle trimmed with jet, which she treated with respect. And Madame Aurélie called to Denise:

"Come here and make yourself useful. Put this on."

Denise, miserable and disconsolate, convinced that she would never succeed in this house, was standing leaning against the wall in a helpless attitude. She would be sent away she knew very well, and the boys would starve. The noise and confusion had made her

head ache, and her arms were weary with the task she had performed all day long in carrying these heavy loads to and fro. She obeyed this peremptory summons, and allowed Margu rite to drape the mantle over her as over a wire form.

"Stand up straight," said Madame Aur lie.

But presently the mantle and Denise were forgotten, for Mouret entered with Vallegnose and Bourdouce, and received the compliments of these ladies on his magnificent exhibition. The Eastern *salon* was highly praised. Vallegnose expressed more surprise than admiration. As for Bourdouce, he seemed to forget that he had any personal interest in the establishment, and congratulated Mouret warmly, hoping to obliterate the memory of the morning's misgivings.

"Yes, I am greatly pleased," answered Mouret, radiant, replying by a smile to Henriette's tender glances. "But pray do not let me intrude upon you, ladies."

Then everybody turned again to Denise. She yielded to Margu rite's hands and was slowly turned around.

"What do you think of it?" asked Madame Marly of Madame Desfor ges, whom she regarded as the high priestess of fashion.

"It is not bad, and the cut is original. But I do not think it fits well on the shoulders."

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame Aur lie, "you must see it on Madame herself. You see it has no effect upon this young lady, who does not carry herself well. Pray straighten your back a little and give the mantle the importance it deserves."

There was a general smile. Denise had become deadly pale. She was overwhelmed with shame at being thus transformed into a machine to be examined and commented on thus freely. Madame Desforges, yielding to an instinctive antipathy, and provoked at the gentle sweetness of the girl's face, added maliciously:

"It would fit better if the young lady's dress was not quite so large."

As she said this she gave Mouret a mocking glance—the glance of a true Parisian who is amused by a provincial. He felt the silent caress of this glance, and the triumph of the woman who is happy in her beauty and her art. He, of course, in his gratitude at being adored, felt it his duty to laugh in his turn in spite of the kindness he felt toward Denise, whose secret charm his gallant nature more than suspected.

"A little of the material could certainly be spared," he said.

This was the crowning touch. The directors laughed as did all the saleswomen. Marguérite turned away to conceal her merriment, Clara had thrown aside a customer to join the group, and several of the girls from the *lingerie* counter had come in. As to the ladies, they were quietly amused. Madame Aurélie never smiled. Her imperial brow was contracted with a frown. She did not choose that a girl in her department should be held up to ridicule.

Denise instinctively felt that Madame Desforges and Mouret were united by a common tie, and her heart was stung by a new misfortune when she heard them join in a laugh against her. This lady was very cruel,

she thought, to treat a poor girl in this way, and Mouret himself froze her as usual with fear. This feeling she did not attempt to analyze. A keen sense of injustice brought tears to her eyes, and it was with difficulty that she restrained her tears and choking sobs.

"It is too much!" said Madame Aurélie to Bourdouce, the terrible Bourdouce who had at the beginning felt and shown utter contempt for the young girl.

And as the forewoman lifted the mantle from the shoulders of Denise, she said in a low voice:

"Well! Mademoiselle, you have disgraced yourself! Upon my word, had you tried to show what you could do—! No one could be sillier."

Denise, fearing that she could not restrain her tears longer, hurried back to the pile of garments which she had been classifying at the counter. There at least she was out of the way, and fatigue prevented her from thinking. Suddenly she perceived at her side Pauline, the saleswoman in the *lingerie* room, the one who in the morning had taken up the cudgels in her defense.

Pauline whispered in her ear:

"My poor child, do not be so sensitive. I tell you I know what I am saying. I come from Chartres, my name is Pauline Cugnat, and my father is a carpenter. When I first came here I felt that I must get away, that I could not stay, I was so worried by their treatment of me. Courage then! Give me your hand and we will have a long talk together whenever you say the word."

The touch of the girl's hand redoubled the emotion

of Denise. She pressed it secretly and hastily lifted an armful, a pile of garments, fearing that she was doing wrong in some way and would certainly be scolded.

In the meantime, Madame Aurélie herself placed the mantle on Madame Marly's shoulders, and everyone exclaimed:

"Oh! oh! superb and graceful! What a difference." Madame Desforbes decided that nothing could be better. Mouret departed, while Vallegnose, who had seen Madame de Boves and her daughter among the laces, hastened to offer his arm to the mother. Marguérite, standing at one of the cashier's desks was enumerating the various purchases of Madame Marly, who paid and ordered the package to be placed in her carriage at the door. Madame Desforbes found all her purchases at the cashier's desk No. 10. Then the ladies met again in the Eastern *salon*, where there was another outburst of enthusiasm. Madame Guibal herself warmed up.

"Oh! delicious, wonderful!"

"Is it not? And how cheap the things are."

"Look at that Smyrna rug, was there ever anything softer in tint?"

"And look at that Kurdistan."

The crowd now began steadily to diminish. A bell at an hour's interval had rung for the two first dinners. the table was nearly ready for the third, and only a few customers lingered at the different counters, and they seemed to forget the lateness of the hour. The whole shop was in wild confusion, looking under the brilliant light of the gas as if a hurricane had passed

over it. The clerks were utterly fatigued. At the glove counter there was a pile of empty boxes, and the woolen room was absolutely impassable. Above-stairs the confusion and disorder was even greater: furs lay on the floor, cloaks and mantles looked as if they had been flung aside in some sudden terror.

Below, in the basement, the work was going on with unabated activity, for all the packages were to be sent out that night. But the silk department was, so to speak, in ruins; the *Paris Bonheur* had been swept away as by a swarm of locusts.

Huten and Favier stood looking over their books, calculating their percentage on their sales. Favier had made fifteen francs, Huten only thirteen, and he was cursing his ill-luck. Their eyes glittered with cupidity, and with the same feverish thirst for gain that actuated the whole house.

"Well! Bourdoucle," cried Mouret, "do you still tremble?"

He had returned to his favorite position at the head of the stairs, and stood leaning against the railing, smiling a victorious smile upon the scene of ruin and devastation below. His momentary fears of the morning were a secret in his own breast, no one would ever know his unpardonable weakness. The battle was won—the petty trade of the *Quartier* forever ruined, and the Baron Hartmann was conquered with his millions and his real estate. While he watched the cashiers bending over their desks, and heard the rattle of the gold as they counted it, he saw the *Bonheur des Dames* immeasurably extended—his galleries

and halls stretching out as far as the *Rue du Dix-December*.

"You must admit now, Bourdoucle, that this house is too small. It ought to be twice as large."

Bourdoucle was humiliated and at the same time overjoyed at being in the wrong. But they both became suddenly grave. L'Homme, the first cashier, had as usual received all the money taken at the desks of the assistant cashiers. After adding these together, he wrote down the total receipts and fastened the paper to his steel point. This being done, he bore the cash in a portfolio or in bags to the great safe.

On this day, gold and silver predominated, and he slowly mounted the staircase carrying three enormous bags pressed against his breast by his left arm, for as we have before stated, his right had been amputated at the shoulder. He was obliged to use his chin to help support these bags, and prevent them from slipping. His labored breathing was heard at some distance; he passed the respectful crowd of clerks with dignity.

"How much, L'Homme?" asked Mouret.

The cashier replied:

"Eighty thousand, seven hundred and forty-two francs, ten centimes."

A joyous shout ran through the *Bonheur des Dames*. The cipher was amazing and the largest that any house of the kind had ever taken in any one day.

This night, when Denise crawled up to bed, she supported herself against the walls of the narrow corridor. In her room, when the door was locked, she

threw herself on her bed, so cruelly did she suffer from the pain in her feet. She lay looking some time at the dressing-table, the wardrobe and the strange, bare walls. Was it here that she was to live? And were the days to come, to be like this that had just vanished? She would never have courage to endure such a life. Then she noticed that she was clad in silk. This uniform oppressed her, and she felt a childish longing to put on her old woolen dress that lay on the chair. When she put it on, the sobs that she had kept back all day nearly choked her, and the tears came fast and hot. She had thrown herself again on the bed and wept at the thought of the two children, and continued to weep without having strength to undress, though she was so utterly worn out by fatigue and sorrow.

Denise, the next morning, had hardly been in the cloak room a half hour, when Madame Aurélie said in her curt way:

"Mademoiselle, you are wanted in the office."

The young girl found Mouret alone, seated in his office, with its hangings of green rep. He had suddenly remembered the occurrences of the day before, and though as a rule he allowed others to find fault rather than himself, he determined on this occasion to make the little provincial see that she must dress with more care, for he had been greatly annoyed—his vanity had, in fact, been wounded in the presence of Madame Desforges, by seeing one of his saleswomen ridiculed. He felt, in short, both angry and compassionate.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "we took you here, out

of regard for your uncle, and you should not expose us to the disagreeable necessity—"

Here he stopped. Opposite his desk stood Denise, erect, serious and pale. Her black silk dress was no longer too large; on the contrary it fitted her rounded waist and her beautiful shoulders to perfection, and if her hair, massed together in heavy braids, was not elegantly dressed, it was at least smooth and neat. After falling asleep, exhausted with weeping, all dressed as she was, the young girl awaking at dawn had been ashamed of her nervous susceptibility, and at once went to work to make her dress smaller. When this task was successfully accomplished, she passed an hour before her small mirror, endeavoring to arrange her hair as she believed would be approved of by Madame Aurélie.

"Ah! Thank heaven!" murmured Mouret. "You look much better this morning; only there are still a few stray locks."

He arose and began to arrange her hair with the same familiar gesture that Madame Aurélie had employed the previous day, when she made the same attempt.

"This should go behind the ear," he said, "and the chignon is too high!"

She did not speak, she allowed him to do as he pleased. She had entered the office with the firm conviction that she was to receive her dismissal, and the kind tone and manner of Mouret did not reassure her; she continued to feel that vague dread and uneasiness which she explained to herself as very natural

before this powerful man, on whom her destiny depended. When he saw that she trembled under his touch he regretted his good nature, for he feared above all things to compromise his authority.

"The fact is," he said as he returned to his desk, "you must be more careful in regard to your appearance. You are no longer at Valognes, you must study and imitate our Parisians. Your uncle's name was enough to induce us to open our house to you, but I trust you will exert yourself to perform what your face seems to promise. The trouble is, that the rest of the people here do not seem to agree with me. You see how it is, don't let them think that I have made a mistake."

He treated her as if she had been a child, with more pity than kindness, and with a certain curiosity to see what could be made of this poor awkward child. She, while he lectured her, happened to glance up at the portrait of Madame Hédouin, whose handsome face smiled gently down upon her from the gilt frame, and she shivered from head to foot in spite of the encouraging words that he uttered. It was the dead lady she thought, the wife whom the *quartier* accused him of killing, in order that he might use her money as he pleased.

Mouret continued to speak.

"You can go," he said at last as he took up his pen.

She went away. And when the door closed behind her she drew a sigh of relief.

From this day Denise showed the greatest possible courage. In spite of the tears shed in secret, in spite

of many pangs as she thought of herself alone and friendless, she carried a brave, and even a gay face, while she performed all of her duties steadily. She was very quiet, and went on her way, turning neither to the right nor the left, she was always gentle and amiable, for this was her nature: her slender childish hands acquired new strength, and her smiling face was unmoved by the anger she aroused in her companions.

She learned to endure the terrible fatigue of her duties; the piles of clothing she carried to and fro strained the muscles of her arms so severely that for the first six weeks she groaned each time she turned in her sleep at night. But she suffered still more from her shoes, the heavy shoes she had brought from Valognes, which the lack of money prevented her from replacing by light boots. Always standing from morning until night, and scolded if she were seen leaning for a moment against the wall, her feet were swollen—those little feet which were like those of a child, and the soles were covered with blisters; her whole frame and system suffered and yet she, delicate and fragile as she looked, bore up under that to which so many saleswomen have succumbed, continuing to smile although nearly worn out by what few men could have endured.

Her greatest trouble was that all the other women in the cloak department were against her. To the physical martyrdom was added the continual persecution of her comrades. After two months of patience and gentleness she had not yet disarmed them. There were cruel words, bitter words, which struck her to the heart when she most felt the need of tenderness.

She had heard many sharp words about her unfortunate *début*, and she was called "stupid" from one end of her room to the other.

When finally she was discovered to be a remarkable saleswoman and showed a wonderful quickness in mastering the business details of the day, there was an interval of indignant stupor, and from that moment her companions so successfully manœuvred that they robbed her of every important customer. Marguérite and Clara pursued her with an instinctive hatred, and even became friendly toward each other, in their hatred of the new comer, whom they feared in spite of their affected disdain.

Madame Aurélie was herself wounded by the proud reserve of this young girl who did not hover around her with an air of enthusiastic admiration, and consequently abandoned Denise to the jealousy and envy of the little court who fed the forewoman with perpetual flattery. Madame Frédéric for a time seemed to hold herself aloof from the plot, but this was probably mere inadvertence, for she became as disagreeable as the others as soon as she found where her good manners were leading her.

Finally Denise saw herself shunned by all, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she maintained her resolution to remain in her situation.

Such was her life. She smiled graciously and prettily, wearing the silken dress that was not her own; she was dying of fatigue, ill-fed and ill-treated. Her bed-room was her only refuge, the only place where she could abandon herself to her tears after a long

day of suffering. But her room was appallingly cold from the snow that lay thick on the zinc roof in these bleak December days; she shivered in her little iron bed under all her clothing, and pulled the blanket over her face that her tears might not freeze on her cheeks.

Mouret now never spoke to her, and when she encountered the severe eyes of Bourdouce she trembled from head to foot—for she felt an innate conviction that in him she had a natural enemy, who would never forgive the smallest error in her.

And amid this general hostility she was amazed to find that Inspector Jouve was disposed to treat her with especial kindness. Whenever she met him he smiled upon her and said a few amiable words; twice he had saved her from reprimands, but she was more disturbed than grateful.

One evening, after dinner, when the saleswomen were putting the wardrobe in order, Joseph came to tell Denise that a young man was inquiring for her. She hurried down stairs in some perturbation.

"Ah!" said Clara, "our country friend has a lover, then?"

"I doubt it!" answered Margu rite.

Denise found her brother Jean waiting for her near the door. She had distinctly forbidden his presenting himself in the shop in this way, but she did not venture to scold him, although he was out of breath and wore no cap. It was plain that he had run all the way from the Faubourg du Temple.

"Have you ten francs?" he gasped. "Give me ten francs, or I am a ruined man!"

This tall boy, with his blonde hair all blown in the wind, was so droll with his girlish face as he uttered this melo-dramatic phrase, that she would have smiled but for the anguish into which she was thrown by this demand for money.

"Ten francs!" she murmured, "what do you want them for?"

He colored, and explained that he had met the sister of one of his comrades. Denise silenced him here by her own embarrassment. He had come twice before on smaller errands, but for smaller sums, the first time for twenty-five cents, and the second for thirty, and there was always some woman involved.

"I cannot give you ten francs," she said. "Pépé's month is not yet paid, and I have only that money and a little more—enough to buy myself some boots, of which I stand in great need. You really, Jean, are very unreasonable, and I think it unkind."

"I am lost, then!" he cried, with a tragic gesture. "Listen, little sister. She is a tall brunette. I have been to the *café* with her brother and herself, and I had no idea that the little bill—"

She saw tears in the boy's eyes, and hastily pulled out her porte-monnaïé, and taking from it a two dollar note, slipped it into his hand. Then instantly he began to laugh.

"I knew you would help me!" he cried, "and never again will I come to you for money. I swear it."

And he dashed off, after kissing her like a madman, at which sight all the shop was stunned.

That night Denise did not sleep. She felt a co

tinual carking anxiety about money, for as yet she had no fixed salary, and as her fellow-saleswomen prevented her from waiting on customers whenever it was in their power to do so, she had only succeeded in making enough money to pay Pépé's board. It was utter poverty and destitution hidden under her robe of silk. She often passed the whole night darning her chemises as carefully as if they had been rare lace. She sewed patches on her shoes as skilfully as a shoemaker could have done; she did her washing in the basin. But her old woolen dress gave her an infinite deal of thought; she had no other, and yet was obliged to put it on every evening when she took off her silk uniform. A rent in it was therefore a catastrophe—a spot cost her a tear. She had not one sou to buy the many little things of which a woman stands in need. She had been obliged to wait a fortnight before she could renew her supply of needles and cottons. What, then, must have been her sensations when Jean, with his foolish love stories, swooped down upon her and carried off so much of her little hoard? The loss of a twenty cent piece created a vacuum which it was difficult for her to fill up. Where was she to obtain ten francs the next day? It was useless to dream of it for a moment.

All that night she tossed and turned, her broken slumbers haunted by night-mares. She dreamed of Pépé thrust out of doors, and of herself digging up the paving stones of the street with bleeding fingers, persuaded that she should find money under them. And when morning came she was obliged to smile and

move about in her silk dress as if she had not a care in the world. Madame Aurélie called her several times to try on some mantles, that favored customers might admire a novel style or cut. And while she stood like a fashion-plate she was thinking of the forty francs due for Pépé's board, which she had promised to pay that evening. She could buy no boots that month, at all events; but even adding this amount to the thirty francs she already had, only made thirty-four, and where on earth was she to get the six francs she needed to make up the sum due for Pépé? Her heart was heavy with anguish.

"Notice how easy the fit is over the shoulders," said Madame Aurélie. "It is very stylish, and at the same time very comfortable; the young lady can fold her arms perfectly well."

"Yes, indeed," added Denise, politely, "it binds nowhere. I am sure you would like it, Madame."

Denise, as she spoke, was reproaching herself for having taken Pépé out the previous Sunday. The poor child had so few pleasures. But she had bought him some gingerbread and a little shovel, and had taken him into Guignol's; all of which amounted to twenty-nine sous. Why could not Jean think of the child when he was tempted to commit follies? Why should she bear everything?"

"Perhaps," said the forewoman, "you would like a circular better. Have the kindness, Mademoiselle, to put on the circular, so that Madame can judge."

And Denise walked up and down, drawing the circular around her slender form, saying: Digitized by Google

"It is warmer, and it is the latest fashion."

All that day, under the smiling suavity which was part of her duties, she tortured herself to know where to find the money which she needed so sorely. The other saleswomen were momentarily off their guard, and allowed her to make an important sale; but it was only Tuesday, and she could receive no percentage until the end of the week. After dinner she decided to postpone until the next day her visit to Madame Gras. She would apologize, and say she had been detained, and perhaps then she would have the six francs.

As Denise avoided the smallest expenditure she was in the habit of retiring at a very early hour. What could she do in the streets without a penny and in a constant state of terror at the vastness of the city of which she knew nothing, except the streets close to the shop where she was employed? After venturing as far as the Palais Royal, merely for air and exercise, she hurried back and busied herself with sewing or with some necessary washing. She had no friend. Of all the shop girls only one, Pauline, showed her the smallest kindness, and as the two departments, that of the *confections*, and that of the *lingerie*, were on anything but good terms, the sympathy of the two saleswomen, Denise and Pauline, was confined to the exchange of a few hurried words. Pauline, it is true, occupied a neighboring chamber, the one on the left of Denise; but as she disappeared on leaving the table and did not return until eleven o'clock, the latter only heard her going to bed and never chanced to meet her outside of working hours. Denise, this evening of which we write,

had again resigned herself to being a shoemaker; she examined her shoes and wondered if in any way she could make them last another month. Then with a stout needle she began to sew the soles to the uppers, which threatened to part company. All this while a collar and cuffs were soaking in the wash basin. The clock had struck eleven, ten minutes since, when a light foot-fall made her lift her head quickly. It was one of the young ladies who had come in at this late hour again. She listened a moment and found that it was Pauline, for she heard her open the next door. But presently she was astonished beyond words, for Pauline returned to her door and knocked softly.

"Make haste, it is I."

The saleswomen were forbidden to visit each other in their rooms, therefore Denise hastened to turn the key that Madame Cabiú, who was always on the watch for the smallest infringement of rules, might not catch her now.

"Was she there?" Denise added as she closed the door.

"Who? Madame Cabiú?" said Pauline. "Ah! it is not of her that I am afraid. Any one can buy her with a hundred sous!"

Then she added:

"I saw your light, and as I have wished to talk to you, I determined to try to do so to-night. One never has a chance down stairs. Then too, you looked so sad this evening at the table."

Denise thanked her and urged her to be seated, for she was touched by the girl's good nature. In th

excitement caused by this unexpected visit, she had not dropped the shoe she was sewing. Pauline saw it and shook her head; then, looking round, she perceived the sleeves and the collar in the basin.

"My poor child," she said, "this is just what I expected. I know the whole story from sad experience. When I first came from Chartres, and when my father never sent me a sou, I was in the habit of washing my chemises. As I had but two, one was always soaking."

Pauline had seated herself, for she was quite out of breath from having run up the stairs. Her large face, with her small bright eyes and big mouth, had a certain grace, in spite of the clumsiness of her features. And without the smallest introduction she began to narrate her story; she told of her youth at the mill, of how her father was ruined by a law-suit, and how she was sent to Paris to make her fortune with twenty francs in her pocket. Then she described her first experience as a shop-girl in a shop at Batignolles, then at the *Bonheur des Dames*—a terrible experience, which had cost her much suffering and many privations; and finally she told how she was now receiving two hundred francs monthly, and how she had many amusements, and how little she cared what was said or done during the day.

A watch chain and a breast-pin glittered on her robe of dark blue cloth, fitting coquettishly to her round waist, and she smiled from under her velvet gray *toque*, trimmed with a long plume.

Denise flushed deeply as she stood with her shoe

still in her hand. She attempted to stammer an explanation.

"I know all about it!" answered Pauline. "And I am older than you, too; I am twenty-six years and six months. I don't look it, do I? Tell me your story, now."

Denise yielded to this frankly offered friendship. She huddled an old shawl about her shoulders and sat down next Pauline. The two girls embarked in a long talk. The room was chilly, for the cold seemed to creep in under the Mansard roof. They did not notice this, however, nor that their fingers were stiff. By degrees Denise became very confidential, spoke of Pépé and Jean, and said how she was worried about money. Then they spoke of the saleswomen in the cloak department.

Pauline exclaimed:

"Oh! I know their game—mean creatures that they are! If they behaved decently to you, you could make with ease more than one hundred francs."

"They are all determined to prevent my doing any thing," answered Denise, half crying, "and I am sure I don't know why. Then, too, Monsieur Bourdoucle watches me all the time, as if he wished to catch me in some crime. Father Jouve is the only one—"

The other interrupted her.

"That old monkey! Ah! my dear, don't trust him. Men with big noses like that, you know, should never be believed. He makes a great show with his decoration, but I know a story about him. You are a baby,

though, to fret like this. It is a real misfortune to be so sensitive."

Pauline seized her companion's hands and embraced her. The question of money was certainly a very grave one. A poor girl could not support her two brothers, pay the board of the younger, and treat the fair friends of the elder, only by picking up the unfrequent sous for which others did not care to take any trouble. It was to be feared moreover that she would not be regularly appointed before the March quarter.

"Listen to me, it is quite impossible that you can stand this state of things," said Pauline. "If I were in your place—"

But a slight sound in the corridor here silenced her. She pressed her friend's hands and looked at her a moment in silence as she still listened. Then she resumed in very low tones.

"If I were in your place, I should take some one."

"How do you mean? Take some one?" repeated Denise, much puzzled.

When at last she understood, she drew her hands away and sat as if stunned. This advice did not please her, she had never thought of such a thing and she could see no advantage in it.

"Oh! no," she said quietly.

"Then," continued Pauline, "you will never be any better off, you may be sure of that. Figures can't lie. Forty francs for the little one, occasional silver pieces given to the big brother, come to considerable after a time. Then too, you cannot always go about in your present state of destitution, wearing shoes at which all

the shop women laugh. Yes, it is true, those shoes do you much harm. Take some one, it will be much better."

"No," repeated Denise.

"But you have no sense, my dear child! Besides, it is not a matter of choice, I really do not see what else you can do; I came here at first just as you have done, and had not one sou. I was lodged and fed to be sure, but there was my toilette, and one can't live entirely without money, shut up in these four walls with nothing to do in the evening but count the flies on the ceiling."

Then she went on to speak of her first lover, a lawyer's clerk, whom she had met at Mendon. After that there was an employé in the post-office, and finally in the autumn she had made the acquaintance of one of the salesmen in the *Bon Marché*, a very nice fellow, with whom she spent all her leisure hours. But she never had but one lover at a time, she would scorn such treachery, and then she spoke with contempt of women who threw themselves away.

"I do not advise you to misconduct yourself," she said quickly, "you must see that. Now I would not be seen with your Clara, lest I should be accused of behaving as she does. But when a girl has only one lover and lives peaceably, I don't see why any one should reproach her. Does it seem such a shocking thing to you?"

"No," answered Denise, "only I don't like it, that is all."

There was a long silence, the two girls finally smiled

as they looked at each other in this little, chilly room. They were somewhat agitated by their conversation. Finally Denise spoke:

"One must first feel a liking for some one," she said with her pale face flushing.

Pauline was astonished, and then began to laugh, and embraced her friend warmly, saying as she did so:

"But, child, you can meet some one so easily, and be pleased with him. How green you are! Come now, shall Baugh take us next Sunday into the country? He can invite one of his friends, you know."

"No," said Denise, with gentle obstinacy.

Pauline said no more. Every one was free to act her own pleasure, of course. She had spoken out of the goodness of the heart, for she was really affected at seeing a comrade so unhappy. And as midnight was about to strike, she rose to leave. But in the first place she compelled Denise to accept the six francs which she now required, and implored her not to hasten to return them, to do so at her convenience.

"Now," she added, "you must put out your candle, so that no one can tell which door is opened; you can light it again, you know."

The two girls shook hands once more in the darkness, and Pauline glided away, leaving no sign of her recent presence, except the faint echo of her footsteps.

Before going to bed, Denise wished to finish mending her shoe and washing her collars. The cold became sharper as the night wore on. But she did not feel it, for the conversation had stirred the blood in her veins. She was not in the least shocked, for it

seemed to her that when one is alone in the world, one had a right to arrange her life as she chooses.

She had never exercised this right, as her common sense and healthy nature kept her in the straight and narrow path.

About one o'clock she extinguished her light and laid down on her bed. No, she loved no one. What good would it do to disarrange her life and so mar the maternal devotion she had vowed to her two brothers. But she did not fall asleep, little shivers passed over her whole frame and indistinct forms flitted before her closed eyelids and faded away in the darkness.

From this moment Denise became greatly interested in the heart histories of her department. There was a great deal of gossip and several adventures of a somewhat scandalous nature. Clara was a disgrace to the *Bonheur*; she had three lovers, to say nothing of chance acquaintances, and if she did not leave the shop, where she really did very little, it was because she wished to protect herself from the suspicions of her family; she lived in constant terror of her father, who swore that if she went wrong, he would come to Paris and kick her about the streets.

Margu rite, on the contrary, behaved well—it was not known that she had any lovers. Madame Fr d ric came in for her share of gossip; it was said that she had some grand person for a lover, but the truth was that nothing was known of her affairs. She disappeared at night stiff and erect in her widow's weeds, and hurried away without any one being able to say where she went in such haste. The stories about Madame Aur lie

and her retinue of obedient young men, were certainly false, and probably invented by the saleswomen to whom she had been severe, in order to turn her into ridicule. Perhaps she might have been too kind to some friend of her sons, in former days, but now she was a thorough business woman, who did not care to waste her time in such frivolities.

When business hours were over, nine out of ten of these lovers were waiting at the door—on the Place Gaillon—along the Rue de la Michodière and the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin these men were scattered—and as the shop girls came along, each man extended his arm to his own friend, and the two walked away together, talking with conjugal serenity.

But Denise was most disturbed at having discovered Colomban's secret. She saw him continually on the threshold of her uncle's shop, watching the young ladies in the cloak room. When he saw her, he colored and turned hastily away, as if he feared that the young girl would betray him to her cousin Geneviève, although there was very little intercourse between the Baudus and their niece since the entrance of the latter into the *Bonheur des Dames*.

Denise thought that Colomban was in love with Marguérite, but was thunderstruck to discover that the ardent regards of the clerk were really fixed upon Clara. For months he had been in this state without having courage to declare himself, and this for a girl who took a new lover every day! Clara seemed to have no suspicion of her conquest. Denise was greatly troubled by her discovery. What was this love of

which every one was talking? How could it be that a young fellow who had a happy life before him, could throw it away, to run after a worthless creature like this Clara? And from this time her heart contracted with a dull pain whenever she beheld, behind the greenish glass, in the windows of her uncle's shop, the pale, sad face of her cousin Geneviève.

Denise had her dreams, too, in the evening, when she saw the shop girls walk away with their lovers. Those who slept at the *Bonheur* were compelled to be in their little attic rooms at eleven o'clock, unless they had obtained permission to go to the theatre; the others vanished until the next day. And the young girl replied with a smile to the friendly nod given her by Pauline as she hurried away to join Baugh, who regularly waited for her near the Fountain on the Square.

Denise was always the last to go out, and having taken her rapid, solitary walk, the first to come in. She then sewed, or went to bed with her head filled with dreams and devoured by curiosity in regard to this outside life of which she knew nothing. She was not jealous of these girls and she loved her solitude, in which she entrenched herself as a blessed refuge. But her imagination was all astir; she heard of pleasures she had never known—of theatres and restaurants, of Sundays spent on the water and in the country. She felt a strange weariness when she thought of them; it seemed to her sometimes that she was tired of these amusements which she had never tasted. But there was little time in her busy life for this dangerous dreaming. In the thirteen hours of daily toil, there

was not much thought expended by either salesmen or saleswomen on each other. A few rare and isolated instances had taken place of love affairs in the *Bonheur*, between the male and female clerks, but as a rule they were but the wheels of the great machine, abdicating all personality until they were without the doors of the great establishment.

Denise nevertheless chanced to see Alfred L'Homme, the son of the forewoman, slip a note into the hand of one of the saleswomen in the *lingerie* department. He had passed through the room several times with an air of indifference, before finding an opportunity of delivering his tender epistle.

It was now the dull season, which may be said to last from December to February, and Denise was, therefore, enabled to secure brief intervals of rest. She waited for customers with her thoughts far away. The saleswomen in the *lingerie* department exchanged occasional jests with the clerks at the lace counter. Among these last, was a man who pursued Clara with coarse jokes, but did not find her sufficiently attractive to seek her outside of the establishment. Consequently there were significant glances and little giggles running up and down the counters whenever that terrible Bourdoucle turned his back. As to Deloche, he contented himself for a time with smiling whenever his eyes met those of Denise. After a while, however, he became bolder, and murmured a word or two when he passed her. The day she saw Madame Aurélie's son give his note to the girl at the linen counter, Deloche had just asked her if she had had a good breakfast.

This question originated in a desire to be amiable. He saw the note delivered as well as Denise; he looked at the girl, and both blushed at the thought of the intrigue going on under their eyes.

But Denise, in spite of these incidents which occasionally stirred the woman within her, still kept her childlike peace of heart. Meeting Hutten, as she did occasionally, brought the color to her face, but she believed it to be caused by gratitude, and thought she was simply touched by the young man's politeness. He never brought a customer to her department without causing her confusion, and she often, when sent to the cashier, took pains to go through the silk rooms. One afternoon she saw Mouret there, who greeted her with a smile, but did not speak to her. In fact he never addressed her nowadays, and never gave her any further advice as to her toilet.

Denise trembled before this smile, and asked herself if he knew why she crossed the silk room, when she herself would have found it difficult to explain the reason of her doing so.

Hutten, however, did not seem to notice the grateful looks of the young girl. These shop-girls were not to his taste; he affected to despise them, and boasted of his wonderful adventures with the customers at his counter. A Baroness had confessed herself his slave, and the wife of an architect one day when he went to her in regard to an error in a purchase, had professed her willingness to fall into his arms. Like the rest of the clerks he was wild to make money, only to spend it on Sunday at the race-course and in restau-

rants. He never saved or laid up a sou—in fact, everything was spent before he received it, with absolute disregard for the future.

Favier never made one of these parties. He and Hutén, intimate as they were in the shop, bowed and parted outside of the door. Like many more of the clerks, they absolutely knew nothing of each other, except within the walls of the *Bonheur*. Hutén's intimate associate was Liénard. They both lived in the same Hôtel—the Hôtel de Smyrne, Rue Sainte-Anne, a dark, dingy place, filled with clerks. In the morning they arrived together, and at night the one who was first liberated when his counter was in order, went to wait for the other at the Café Saint-Roch, a small place where the clerks of the *Bonheur des Dames* were in the habit of meeting to smoke and play cards. They often remained there so late that the landlord was obliged to put them out of doors. For the last month they had been at a *café* at Montmartre three times each week, where they took many of their comrades, to make a success for Madame Laure—a singer, and Hutén's last conquest. They applauded her with such vehemence that the police were obliged to interfere.

The winter passed away in this fashion. Denise finally obtained a salary of three hundred francs. It was quite time, for her shoes were literally gone, and for a month she had not ventured out of the house lest she should come back barefooted.

"What a noise you make, Mademoiselle, with those terrible shoes!" said Madame Aurélie, in an annoyed

tone. "It is really unendurable! What on earth do you wear on your feet?"

The day that Denise appeared in the cloth gaiters, for which she had paid five francs, Marguérite and Clara said in audible voices:

"The country girl has left off her galoshes!"

"What a pity!" answered the other, "for they must have belonged to her mother."

A general dislike existed toward Denise. The department had discovered her friendship with Pauline, and had looked upon it as a bravado. The idea, they said, of fraternizing with a saleswoman in the department with which they were at open warfare! The war between the *lingerie* and *confection* departments assumed new and violent proportions—harsh words were exchanged like so many cannon balls, and one evening, behind a box of shirts, even a smart slap was heard. Perhaps the ground of this quarrel was that the clerks in the *lingerie* room wore woolen gowns, and the others wore silk; however that may be, the girls at the linen counter spoke of their neighbors with the contempt that ought to be felt by honest girls for those who are thoroughly corrupt. Clara was bidden to name the number of her lovers; Marguérite was taunted with her early error, and Madame Frédéric was accused of great misconduct. All this on account of this Denise!

"Not another word, young ladies, be quiet!" said Madame Aurélie, majestically, "I will not have this sort of thing going on here."

The forewoman preferred to take no sides, as she

one day, confessed to Mouret, in reply to a question he asked. One of these girls was no better than the other; they were all alike. But she changed her mind and flew into a passion when she heard from Bourdoucle that he had found her son in the basement one day with the girl in the *lingerie* department—the same one to whom Denise had seen him giving letters. It was abominable, and she talked in very plain terms of the trap which had been spread for this inexperienced youth—by way of injuring and dishonoring her, when it was found that her department could not be in any way found fault with by reason of her judicious management.

She made all this commotion only to injure the women in the *lingerie* department, for she knew very well that her son was capable of any follies; she no longer cherished any illusion in regard to him.

The affair threatened to assume grave proportions, and the glover Mignol was dragged into it—he was the friend of Albert, and it was said that he favored the fair friends of the former when they came to his counter to purchase gloves. At last, however, Mouret succeeded in silencing the scandal, out of regard to the forewoman, to whom he always showed great deference. Bourdoucle, a week later, dismissed, on some other pretext, the guilty saleswoman who had allowed herself to be kissed. For while they closed their eyes to such disorders of their subordinates as were committed outside of the walls of the *Bonheur*, the head of the house would not allow the smallest license within.

Denise was the one to suffer from this adventure. Madame Aurélie felt very bitterly toward her. She had seen her laughing one night with Pauline, and believed they were gossiping about her son. She therefore was colder and harder than ever toward the girl. She had been thinking for some time of taking these young ladies to pass a Sunday near Rambouillet, where she had bought a little place with the first savings she had made, and now suddenly decided to omit Denise as a punishment. The girl, therefore, was the one omitted in her invitations.

For two weeks this party had been the talk of the department. The sky and the wind were watched, and all sorts of pleasures were anticipated, rides on donkeys, milk and brown bread. Only women were to be invited, and therefore it would be far more amusing. As a rule Madame Aurélie spent her rare holidays with some of her friends, for she was so little with her family and was so uncomfortable on such occasions with only her husband and her son that she preferred to dine at a restaurant. The husband trotted along at her side, delighted to resume the habits of his bachelor days, and Albert followed on. In this way the three never entered their apartment except to sleep and dress. When discussing the Rambouillet party, Madame Aurélie simply said that Albert thought it best not to go, and that her husband would show great tact should he also refuse to appear.

Meanwhile the happy day drew near, the young ladies made their preparations and discussed their toilettes as if they were about to undertake a six

months' voyage. Denise listened to them, pale and silent in her disappointment.

"They have left you out, then?" said Pauline one morning, "were I in your place I would pay them off. They will amuse themselves, and you had best do the same. Go with Baugh and me to Joinville."

"No, thanks," answered the young girl in her usual quiet, obstinate tone.

"But why not? Do you think some one will run away with you there?"

Pauline laughed good naturedly. Denise, too, smiled. She knew very well how things came to pass, and was aware that every one of these girls had met their first lovers in some such accidental way, and she did not care to run any such risk.

"But," continued Pauline, "I will promise that Baugh will not invite any of his friends. There will be only us three."

Denise hesitated; she was filled with such an intense longing to go that her cheeks flushed scarlet. Ever since her fellow clerks had talked of their country pleasures, she had felt as if she were stifling, and had dreamed of nothing but the blue sky and tall grass, through which she could wade; and magnificent old trees whose shade would refresh her like a cold bath.

Her childhood passed in the meadows of Cotentin all came back to her with her longing for sunshine.

"Yes, I will go," she said finally.

It was all settled. Baugh would come for these young ladies at eight o'clock; they would be waiting for him on the Place Gaillon. They would take a *fiacre* to the

Vincennes Station. Denise, whose paltry pittance of twenty-five francs per month, was regularly devoured by the boys, had been able to do no more than refresh her old black dress with bias bands of checked poplin. She had made a hat for herself, and trimmed it with a blue ribbon. In this simple costume she looked very young, like a child who had grown too fast, and was a little ashamed of her height and of the luxuriance of her blonde tresses.

Pauline, on the contrary, appeared in a spring silk of violet and black stripes, a *toque* to match, covered with feathers, ornaments on her throat and rings on her hands; in short she looked comfortable and wealthy.

She adopted this costume as a compensation for being compelled to wear woolen behind her counter; while Denise, who wore her silk uniform from Monday to Saturday, was forced on Sunday to resume her own poor garments.

"There is Baugh," said Pauline, pointing to a tall fellow standing near the fountain.

She presented her lover, and Denise was immediately at her ease, for he seemed to her a good natured young fellow. Baugh was enormously tall, with a long Flemish face. He was born at Dunkirk, was the youngest son of a grocer and had come to Paris, almost driven from home by his father and brother who thought him very stupid; nevertheless at the *Bon Marché* he received three thousand five hundred francs. He was stupid but he understood linens, and the women all liked him.

"Where is the *fête*?" asked Pauline.

They were obliged to go to the Boulevard. The sun was warm and bright, the soft May morning was delicious, there was not a cloud in the sky. An involuntary smile parted the lips of Denise, she drew a long breath and it seemed to her the weight on her chest from which she had been suffering was suddenly lifted. She was thankful to be out of the atmosphere of the *Bonheur des Dames* and rejoiced at the thought of having before her a long country day. She felt almost like a child again, and drank in new health and strength with every breath she drew.

But in the *fête* she turned away uncomfortable, when she saw Pauline lean forward and kiss her lover on his lips.

"Look!" said Denise, "there is Monsieur L'Homme. How he walks!"

"He has his horn," added Pauline, leaning forward. "and what a shabby hat!"

L'Homme in fact, with his instrument under his arm was hurrying along the Rue Gymnase, laughing to himself at the feast he had in prospect. He was going to pass the day with a friend, a flute player at a little theatre.

"At eight o'clock in the morning! Who ever heard of such a thing!" cried Pauline. "You know that Madame Aurélie and all her clique were to take the half past six train."

They began to talk of the Rambouillet party. They did not want it to rain because they too would suffer, but if there could be just a shower which did not

extend to themselves, it would be very droll. As for Clara, she always had more money than she knew what to do with; had she not just bought three pairs of gaiters and thrown them away after cutting holes in them with her scissors, hoping to make them easier for her feet which were covered with corns. She never thought of saving a sou, but wasted, as did the other saleswomen, her whole salary in finery and nonsense.

"But he has but one arm!" said Baugh. "How can he play the French horn with only one arm?"

He had been following L'Homme with his eyes. Then Pauline, who amused herself occasionally with his *naïveté*, told him that the cashier supported the instrument against the wall. This invention Baugh believed and thought very ingenious. Then Pauline, seized with remorse, explained that L'Homme had adopted a peculiar system of stops, which enabled him to use only one hand; but her lover shook his head, saying that she could not expect him to believe that.

"You are very stupid, and that is the truth," she exclaimed, with a laugh; "but I love you all the same!"

The *fâcre* reached the station just in time for a train. Baugh got the tickets and paid for them, but Denise said she intended to pay her own way, and they would settle up in the evening. They went into a second class car, which was filled with a gay crowd. At Nogent a wedding party came on board, amid shouts of laughter.

When they reached Joinville, they went at once to order breakfast, and then they strolled along the

Marne, under the tall poplars. It was cold in the shade, and the air was a little sharp. Denise lingered behind Pauline and her lover, who walked with his arm around her waist. Denise had plucked a handful of buttercups, and was looking first at them and at the limpid water, when suddenly she saw Baugh kiss Pauline on the throat.

Tears came to the girl's eyes, and yet she was by no means unhappy. Why should she have this strange suffocated feeling, with this wide horizon outspread before her? Why should she feel this vague regret, the cause of which she could not understand?

At breakfast she felt bewildered by Pauline's noisy laughter, who had insisted on dining in an arbor in spite of the cold wind. Pauline seemed to like the sudden blasts, and she thought the trellis, uncovered by vines and newly painted, very amusing.

She had an enormous appetite, and devoured with the appetite of a half fed girl such things as she liked. This was her especial vice, and she expended all her money in cakes and candy, at which she nibbled constantly. When Denise had eaten enough eggs and chicken, she prevented her friend from ordering strawberries, knowing that so early in the season they must be very high. "And now what shall we do?" asked Baugh, when coffee was served.

Usually Pauline and he returned to Paris to dine, in order that they might go to the theatre in the evening. But on this occasion they decided to remain at Joinville, because Denise desired to do so. It would be quite a new experience, they thought.

For a minute they talked of a boat, but abandoned it because Baugh rowed too badly. But they wandered along the shore, and became interested in the life of the river, with its Norwegian sailors and its odd boats. The sun was setting and they were turning toward Joinville, when two small boats came down the river. They were racing and shouting insults at each other.

"Hush!" said Pauline, "that is Monsieur Hutén."

"Yes," answered Baugh, shading his eyes from the sun, "yes, it is he, and the other boat is rowed by students."

He then went on to explain the old hatred that existed as schoolboys, between the young fellows who were brought up to trade and those who were intended for professions. Denise, when she heard Hutén's name, had stopped short and with fixed eyes watched the slender boat as it flew past. She distinguished the young man among the rowers, and also saw there were two women in the boat, one of whom wore a red hat.

In the evening they returned to the restaurant. But the air was too cool for them to remain out of doors, and they were obliged to take a table in one of two long rooms, where the dampness from the river was so great that the napkins felt as if they had just been taken from the washtub. At six o'clock every table was in demand. People were hurrying in looking for a corner, and waiters appeared with chairs and placed the plates closer together. The room became so warm that it was necessary to open the window. The day had nearly gone; a greenish twilight seemed to fall from the poplars, and it soon became so dark that the

proprietor, unprovided with lamps, placed a candle on each table. The noise became intolerable, the candles flared in the wind from the open windows, and moths flew about in the air which hot as it was, was cut occasionally by little icy gusts.

"Is not this nice?" said Pauline, busy with a *matelotte*, which she declared to be delicious.

Then leaning over the table, she added:

"You don't see M. Albert, do you?"

Young L'Homme was there with three most doubtful looking women—an old woman in a yellow hat, with an indescribably vulgar face, and two young girls, not more than fifteen or sixteen—impudent and shameless. Albert was tipsy, and hammered with his knife on the table, shouting to the waiter to bring him some *liqueurs* at once.

"What a family!" said Pauline. "The mother at Rambouillet, the father in Paris, and the son at Joinville!"

Denise, who detested noise, tried to smile, and felt a certain comfort in her inability to think in such a hubbub. But all at once, from the next room, came an uproar that covered all others. There were shouts and blows, tables and chairs were thrown down, and the same cries that had been heard on the river were again repeated.

The innkeeper hurried in to quell the tumult, and then Hutten suddenly appeared. He wore a red jacket, a cap was set well back on his head, and on his arm was a tall girl in white, who in order to wear his colors had stuck a bunch of poppies over one ear.

Loud applause greeted their entrance, by which Hutén was much flattered, and he threw out his chest with an air of pride. He had received a blow on his cheek, which was swollen and discolored. This pair was followed by the crew. A table was charged and taken amid a noise that was positively deafening.

"It seems," said Baugh, after listening to the conversation behind him, "it seems that the students recognized the woman who is with Hutén. She was formerly known in this *Quartier*, but she sings at present in a *café* at Montmartre."

"Whoever she is," exclaimed Pauline, somewhat contemptuously, "she is frightfully ugly with her carrot-colored hair. I can't understand where Monsieur Hutén picks up his friends, but every one is a little worse than the others."

Denise had become very pale and icy cold. She felt as if every drop of blood in her heart was being slowly drawn away. When standing on the shore, looking at the boat, she had had something of the same sensation. She saw the terms that this girl was on with Hutén.

She suddenly asked herself if she loved this young man, that she was suffering so intensely. In her agitation, she could not answer her own questions. She had a choking sensation in her throat, her hands trembled, and she could eat nothing.

"What is the matter?" asked her friend.

"Nothing," stammered Denise, "but the room is very warm."

Hutén's table was near and as soon as he saw Baugh, whom he knew, he began to talk to him in a loud voice

that he might still occupy the attention of the room. "Tell me," he cried, "are you as virtuous as usual at the *Bon Marché*?"

"I see no especial difference," answered the other.

"I am told that applicants for positions as saleswomen must appear with the record of their confirmation and must swear that they are as innocent as babes unborn. They keep a confessional there too, and a priest, don't they? They make matches there—! No, I thank you, not any for me!"

The gayety redoubled at this, and even Pauline laughed aloud, but Baugh was not pleased at this attack upon his house, and he suddenly burst forth:

"Anyway I am thankful that I am not at the *Bonheur des Dames*, to be turned away for a word, and I myself don't like an employer who looks as if he were saying to his customers, 'Your money or your life!'"

Huten did not reply. He had wandered off to the charms of a certain young girl in the Place Clichy. Then he told how he had made one hundred and fifty francs that week, and that he would not sleep until he had spent every sou of the money.

As he became more and more interested he began to talk of Robineau, the second clerk, who put on such intolerable airs, and wouldn't walk in the street with one of the salesmen. If Bouthemont had done so it would not be so bad, for the head clerk had of course to keep up his authority. But for a Robineau to assume such dignity was simply preposterous. He had better learn a little manners.

"Hush!" said Liénard, "you are talking too much."

The heat had become intense, the candles were dripping on the cloths all stained with wine, and through the open windows when the noise within momentarily abated, came a low murmur of the voices of the river and of the tall poplar trees.

Baugh had asked for his bill when he saw that Denise was no better and was gradually becoming paler and paler. Her chin quivered with sobs she was trying to control. But the waiter did not come, and she was obliged to remain within the sound of Hutten's voice.

He was now saying that he was much cleverer than Liénard, because Liénard was supported by his father, and he himself lived on the fruit of his own intelligence.

Finally Baugh's bill was brought, which he paid, and then he and the two women went away.

"There is one from the Louvre," said Pauline as they passed through the room, glancing as she spoke at a tall, slender girl who was putting on a cloak.

"You don't know her, how can you say that?" asked Baugh.

"I know it by the way she puts on the cloak, it is plain enough."

At last they stood outside the restaurant and Denise drew a long breath of relief. For a moment she had thought she was dying in that intense heat and in that deafening noise. She had felt very strangely but attributed her sensations to the want of fresh air. Now she could breathe again. A refreshing coolness fell from the starry sky. As the two young girls left the garden of the restaurant a timid voice murmured in the shadow:

"Good evening, ladies."

It was Deloche; they had not seen him at the extreme end of the dining room, where he was all alone, having walked out from Paris for the pleasure of the exercise. Recognizing his voice, Denise, feeling very ill, said, mechanically:

"Monsieur Deloche, you are going home, I suppose? Will you not give me your arm?"

Pauline and Baugh were in front and were greatly astonished at hearing these words. They would not have believed that she could have done it. There was another hour before the train and they decided to walk to the end of the island, and as they strolled along they looked back occasionally and said to each other:

"Where on earth are they? Ah! I see, but it is certainly very droll!"

Denise and Deloche did not speak for some time. The bustle and noise of the restaurant was soon left behind, and became only a gentle murmur, while the lights faded away one by one the deeper they advanced among the trees. In front of them was a dense, black mass in which trunks and branches were dimly discernible; the path was utterly lost and they could only feel their way along. But they continued to advance slowly but fearlessly. After a while their eyes became accustomed to the darkness and they saw the trunks of the tall poplars like columns bearing leafy domes all pierced with stars, and occasionally the water gleamed like steel. The wind had died away and only the rush and ripple of the river was heard.

"I am very glad that I met you," stammered Deloche

at last, seeing that he must speak first. "You know not how much pleasure it gives me to be allowed to walk with you." Then assisted by the darkness he ventured to say that he loved her. He had wanted to write to her for some time, and possibly she would never have known the truth had not this beautiful night been his accomplice, with this musical ripple of the water and the soft stir of the leaves on the trees.

The girl did not reply, her hand rested on his arm, and she continued to walk slowly by his side. He was trying to see her face when he heard a sob.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "are you weeping? Have I pained you?"

"No, no!" she murmured.

She tried to restrain her tears, but it was impossible. As she sat at the table she had thought her heart would break, and now in the darkness her emotion finally overcame her and choking sobs threatened to stifle her, when she thought that if Hutten had been in the place of Deloche and had said what he had just whispered in her ear, she would have been without strength to resist.

This avowal made within her own heart, flushed her face with shame.

"I did not mean to offend you," said Deloche over and over again, greatly moved by her tears.

"Listen to me," she replied in a voice that was yet far from steady. "I am not angry with you, but you must never speak to me again in this way. What you ask is impossible. You are a good fellow, I like you and wish to be your friend, but that is all. Do you understand? Your friend!"

He shivered a little. Then after walking on a few steps in silence he stammered:

"Then you do not love me?"

And as she hesitated before an ungracious no, he went on in a gentle, sad voice:

"I expected it. I have never had the smallest good fortune in my life and I know it is no use to expect to be happy. You see when a man has not plenty of money to waste one might as well give up the battle. You need not fear, I shall not torment you any more; as to loving you, you can't prevent that, can you? And I shall continue to do that as long as I live."

It was now his turn to shed tears. She consoled him, and in their effusion they discovered that they came from the same district. She from Valognes and he from Bruquebec, not thirty kilometres apart. This was a new tie. His father was a Huissier, poor and needy, who treated him very harshly, declaring that his long face and light hair never came to him honestly. The two young creatures began to talk of the fresh green meadows surrounded by wonderful hedges, of the narrow paths winding among the trees, and of the grass-grown highways. They could now distinguish the tall reeds by the river side, the delicate tracery of the leaves above their heads against the pale sky, in which twinkled a myriad of stars, and a certain peace and serenity came to them. They forgot their woes, and felt nearer to each other by reason of their various misfortunes.

"Well?" said Pauline, taking Denise aside, when they reached the station.

The young girl understood the smile and tone of tender curiosity. She flushed deeply and said:

"You are all wrong, my dear! Did I not tell you that I would never love any one? He comes from my district, and we have been talking of Valognes."

Pauline and Baugh were greatly perplexed, and did not know what to think. Deloche left them on the Place de Bassette—he slept in the shop and was obliged to be in at eleven o'clock. Not wishing to make her entrance with him, Denise, who had asked for permission to go to the Theatre, went with Pauline to Baugh's apartment, which he had taken in order to be near the *Bonheur* and Pauline, in the Rue Saint-Roch. They took a *fiacre*, and Denise was thunder-struck to learn as they were driving that her friend did not mean to return to the *Bonheur* that night. Nothing, after all, was easier. Madame Cabiou became conveniently blind and deaf if five francs were given her. Baugh did the honors of his room, which was in the old style of the Empire, his father having sent the furniture to him from home. He became very angry when Denise spoke of settling her account, but finally accepted the fifteen francs she laid on the table. He then insisted on making tea for them over a spirit lamp, but was obliged to go out to buy some sugar. The clock was striking twelve when he filled the cups.

"I must go!" said Denise.

And Pauline replied:

"Presently, but you know the theatres are later than this."

Denise was not at ease in these bachelors' quarters,

and determined that she would never repeat her experience of this day and evening. She rose to go at quarter past twelve.

The door that led to Mouret's apartment and also to the upper floor where his employés were quartered, was on the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin. Madame Cabiou could open it from within, and also see who entered. A faint light was burning in the room of the Janitress. Denise, when she stood within the circle of this light hesitated, vaguely uneasy, for on turning the corner of the street she had seen the door close on the shadow of a man. It must be her employer returning from some *soirée*, and the idea that he was standing in the dark corridor waiting for her, perhaps, caused her one of those sudden, inexplicable fears which so often assailed her, without the shadow of reason. The girl lost her head entirely; she pushed open a door that led into the shop, and which was left unlocked for the watchman to make his rounds.

"Good Heavens! what shall I do!" she stammered, speaking aloud in her emotion.

Suddenly she remembered that above there was another door of communication with the upper rooms, only she must cross the entire shop. She preferred to do this in spite of the darkness. There was no gas burning, but an occasional oil lamp was hung to the lustres; and these bright spots, like golden spangles, reminded one of lanterns scattered through mines. Piles of merchandize assumed strange forms, those of crouching animals and robbers seeking concealment. The intense silence was almost painful. She

turned to the left, and piles of white goods made a long pale line, reminding her of houses in a street seen under a summer sky. She wanted to cross the hall, but was brought up short by piles of cambrics, and decided that it was better to go through the stocking department and that of the woolens. There she was startled by a loud and measured snoring. This came from Joseph, who was asleep behind piles of bombazine and crape. She hurried into the hall which was lighted from above with a pale white light. It looked measureless in size, as churches do in the night. She turned and fled; finally she thought herself saved when she reached the stairs. But on the next floor, in her own department she was seized with a fit of nervous trembling on seeing a lantern coming toward her—it was the firemen making their round to see that all was safe. She did not understand their movements, and watched them as they opened all the doors one after the other. As they approached she took refuge in the lace room, from which she was driven by a voice calling out. She recognized the voice as that of Deloche, who slept on a little iron bed which he made every night behind his counter. He was not yet asleep, but lay with wide open eyes going over the sweet hours of the evening.

"What! is that you, Mademoiselle?" said Mouret, as Denise found herself confronted by him with a small pocket candle-stick in his hand.

She stammered and wished to explain.

Mouret was not angry, but stood looking at her with his usual half-paternal, half-curious air.

"You had permission, then, to go to the Theatre?"

"Yes, sir—"

"And were you amused? To what Theatre did you go?"

"I went to the country, sir."

He laughed heartily. Then he said, with some emphasis:

"And alone?"

"No sir, with a friend, a girl in the next department to me," she replied, with cheeks blazing at the idea that he had doubted her.

He said nothing, but he looked at her earnestly, studying her simple dress and the blue ribbon on her hat. Could it be possible that this little savage would end by being a pretty girl? Her complexion was freshened by the day in the open air, she was really charming, with her blonde hair lightly waving over her brow. For six months he had looked on her as a child and had offered her advice, wondering at times how she would develop in this hot-bed of Paris. He was no longer tempted to laugh at her, he experienced an indefinable sensation of surprise, almost of fear, mingled with tenderness. It was a lover of course who had embellished her thus. At this thought it seemed to him that a favorite bird with which he was playing had pecked him until the blood came.

"Good night, sir," murmured Denise, as without looking at him she continued to ascend the stairs.

He did not reply, but stood watching her until she disappeared. Then he entered his own rooms.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN the stagnant summer season arrived, a perfect panic took possession of the employés of the *Bonheur des Dames*, who stood in terror of dismissal, for the force of the establishment was diminished by two thirds during the heats of July and August.

Mouret, in the morning when he made his inspection, took aside the heads of each department and told them that their force must be diminished as far as possible.

And when the chief hesitated, not knowing which of his men to sacrifice, Mouret would say :

"Decide for yourself, six salesmen are all you require. In October you can have as many as you want again."

Bourdoucle was charged with these executions. He had a curt way of saying, "you are wanted at the desk," which was like the blow of an axe. He was most unscrupulous in finding pretexts for disembarassing the *Bonheur* of superfluous people. He watched for the smallest act of carelessness.

"You are seated, sir. You are wanted at the desk ! You answered me, I think ; you are wanted at the desk ! Your boots are not blacked—you are wanted at the desk !"

Then he would find some reason for cutting off the

heads of many of these unfortunates at a time. He took his stand at the door just before eight o'clock with his watch in his hand. If a clerk were three minutes late, the implacable "you are wanted at the desk!" chilled the young fellow to the heart.

"You have an abominable face," he said one day to a poor devil whose crooked nose annoyed him. "You are wanted at the desk!"

Some of the employés obtained a fortnight's vacation, without salary, which was a more humane way of diminishing expenses. As a general thing the clerks accepted their precarious situations under the spur of necessity, and also because it was no new experience to them. Ever since their arrival in Paris, they had been hustled about, sent first to the right and then to the left, just as it happened at the dictates of prudence or interest. A wheel was found unnecessary to the working of the machine, and was thrown aside. Why should any gratitude be felt, merely because it had done its duty?

The various departments were talking of these changes, indeed they talked of little else; new stories were daily in circulation. The names of the dismissed salesmen were given, as in times of epidemic the dead are counted. The shawl and woolen counters were the first to be weeded. Six clerks vanished in one week. Then quite a drama disturbed the *lingerie* department, where a customer accused the girl who waited on her of eating garlic. The girl was at once dismissed, although she had done nothing more than

eat a crust of bread behind her counter, being always hungry and but half fed.

The management was absolutely pitiless, and acted at once on the smallest complaint made by a customer. No excuse was admitted, the employé was invariably in the wrong and such being the case, must vanish into thin air as soon as possible. He was a defective instrument, injurious to the perfection of the mechanism.

In the general panic everybody was shaking in his shoes; Mignol, one day when he went out, contrary to rules, with a small package under his coat, was caught and dismissed. Liénard, whose indolence was celebrated, was simply saved from dismissal one afternoon when Bourdoucle found him asleep between two piles of velvet, by his being the son of his father.

The L'Hommes were especially uneasy, and expected every day that their son Albert would be sent off. The manner in which he managed his desk was extremely unsatisfactory. Women were continually lounging past it, and Madame Aurélie had twice brought all her influence to bear to preserve him from dismissal.

Denise, in the meanwhile, was in a constant state of tremulous anxiety, and lived in continual expectation of a catastrophe. She tried her best to be courageous and not to yield to her forebodings, but tears blinded her as soon as she closed the door of her bedroom. She pictured herself as turned into the street, her uncle angry with her, and not knowing where to go or to whom to turn—without a sou, for she had been

unable to save anything—and with her two boys to support. The sensations of her first days in the *Bonheur* were all renewed. She felt like a grain of millet seed under a powerful grindstone, and it seemed to her useless to struggle with this great machine, which could crush her to dust with calm indifference.

She knew perfectly well that if any saleswoman in the cloak department was dismissed, it would be herself. She was sure, also, that her companions had found an opportunity of prejudicing Madame Aurélie still more against her during that long day at Rambouillet, for since then the forewoman had treated her with greater severity. Nor had Denise been forgiven for going to Joinville with a girl belonging to the camp of the enemy—that is, to the *lingerie* department—her going out that day was indeed regarded as an act of insubordination and revolt.

Never had the young girl been so badly treated, and at last she gave up all idea of winning the liking of her companions.

"Let them alone!" said Pauline, "they are perfect geese!"

But Denise did not think so. In fact she was greatly intimidated by the airs these saleswomen adopted. Almost all of them through daily association with ladies—their customers—had acquired a certain external elegance of manner which marked them as a class by themselves—something between the *Ouvrière* and the *Bourgeoise*. They knew how to dress and how to move, and under their little airs and graces concealed the most appalling ignorance. They

read an occasional newspaper, and knew all that was going on at the theatres, to be sure.

"You know the country girl has a child," said Clara, one morning, as she entered the cloak room.

Madame Aurélie was not there, and her remark was greeted with loud astonishment.

"Yes, I saw her taking it to walk last evening. I wonder where she keeps it."

Two days later, Marguérite, on coming up from dinner, brought another piece of news.

"Well! I have seen the country girl's lover, a workman. Just think of it, a dirty little workman, with yellow hair, who was peeping through the window at her."

The saleswomen had now settled on two facts, that Denise had a mechanic for a lover, and concealed a child somewhere near the *Bonheur*. Continual allusions were hurled at her, which for some time were entirely harmless; but when she did understand, she turned deadly pale at the monstrosity of such suppositions.

Coloring deeply, she cried:

"What do you mean? They are my brothers."

"Oh! do you hear that! Her brothers indeed!" sneered Clara.

It was time for Madame Aurélie to interfere.

"Hush! young ladies. You had best see to those tickets. Mademoiselle Denise is free to behave well or ill outside of these doors, so long at least as she does her work!"

This defense amounted to a condemnation, and th

young girl, as distressed as if she had been accused of a crime by the forewoman, tried to explain the facts. The saleswomen laughed and shrugged their shoulders. Denise turned away with a dull pain in her heart. Deloche, when he heard the rumor, as he soon did, was so indignant that he spoke of slapping the faces of these girls; in fact, he was only deterred by a fear of compromising Denise. Ever since that evening at Joinville, he had felt for her an almost religious veneration, and a love that he showed by his watchfulness, and by his way of following her about with his eyes like some faithful dog. He did not wish any one to suspect his affection, as it would have led to new mockery; but all the same, he resolved to avenge the girl's wrongs if she were further tormented, or even attacked in his presence.

Denise determined never again to reply to these insults, for no one would believe her, and it was time and words thrown away. When one of the saleswomen ventured on a new allusion, Denise simply riveted her eyes upon her with a sad and quiet expression.

The girl had now other cares and other anxieties. Jean was no more reasonable and prudent than he had hitherto been, and harassed her with perpetual applications for money. Every two or three weeks she received from him a letter of four pages, and when these letters, directed in a large hand, were given her, she hastily thrust them into her pocket, for the saleswomen pretended to be overcome with amusement on seeing them. Then after inventing some excuse to be

alone for a few minutes and she deciphered these letters, she was overcome with terror—her poor Jean was certainly ruined! He told her the most extraordinary adventures, of which she in her ignorance exaggerated the peril. He wanted forty sous with which to calm the jealousy of one woman, and five francs, or six francs to give to a father, who would certainly kill his daughter if he did not have them.

Poor Denise began to see that her salary and her percentage would never supply all these demands and she determined to see if she could not obtain some work outside. She spoke to Robineau, who had felt a certain sympathy for her ever since he first met her at Vincard's, and he procured her some little cravats, at five sous per dozen. At night from nine to one o'clock she could make six dozen, which brought her in thirty sous. But these twenty-six sous satisfied Jean. She never complained of her want of sleep, and would, in fact, have been very well contented if another catastrophe had not once again ruined all her hopes. At the end of the second fortnight when she went to the shop for which she made the cravats she found the doors closed—the people had failed and she herself had lost nineteen francs, a considerable sum to her, one too, on which she had fully relied. All the troubles of the cloak department vanished before this disaster.

"You are sad," said Pauline on meeting her in the corridor leading to their room. "Do you need anything? Tell me frankly."

But Denise now owed her friend ten francs. She answered, trying to smile :

"No, thanks. I have slept badly, that is all."

It was now the 20th of July and the panic among the people at the *Bonheur* was at its height. Bourdoucle had already dismissed fifty out of four hundred employés, and the report was in circulation that he contemplated as many more. Denise paid little attention to these stories now, for she was absorbed in a new adventure of Jean's, more startling than any of the others. He required fifteen francs, and this money would alone save him from the vengeance of a deceived husband.

She had received a letter the preceding evening relating the story in a most dramatic fashion, and two others followed quickly, the last of which she had just read when she met Pauline. In this letter Jean had sworn he would die that night unless she sent him fifteen francs. She was in agony. She could not again use the money she had laid aside for Pépé's board, for she had paid it the previous day.

It seemed to her that ill luck pursued her, for she had hoped to procure her nineteen francs through the mediation of Robineau, who was a friend of the woman for whom she had made the cravats, but Robineau had gone away on a leave of two weeks.

Pauline continued to question her, and later in the day when they chanced to meet in one of the departments, they retired into a corner where they were not likely to be interrupted. Suddenly Pauline turned to fly, she had seen the white cravat of an inspector who was certainly coming toward them.

"No, it is Father Jouve," she murmured with an air

of relief. "He will only laugh when he sees us together. If I were you though, I should be a little afraid, for he is altogether too kind to you, and speaks to the rest of us as if he were at the head of his troopers!"

Father Jouve was thoroughly detested by all the employés, for he was very severe, and reported the smallest disobedience to rules and discipline. More than half of the dismissals were made on his reports.

"Why should I be afraid of him?" asked Denise.

"Because," answered Pauline laughing. "He may take it into his head to demand a proof of your gratitude."

Jouve went on, pretending not to see them, and they heard him blowing up a clerk at the lace counter, who was guilty of looking out of the window at a horse that had fallen in the street.

"By the-way," said Pauline, "were you not looking for Robineau yesterday? I think he has come back."

Denise believed she was saved.

"Thank you," she exclaimed, "I will go through the silk room and perhaps I shall see him; I have just been sent on an errand to the work-room."

The two girls separated, and Denise with a busy air, as if she had an error to correct at the cashier's desk, hurried down the stairs.

It was a quarter past ten, and the bell for the first breakfast had just rung. A hot sun, in spite of the gray linen awnings, made the air insufferable, although boys were watering the floors. There was a general air of sleepiness prevailing the whole establishment. A

few customers sauntered through the gallery with the air of women who were thankful to get into the shade.

As Denise went down the stairs, Favier was measuring off a light silk dress for Madame Bontarel, who had arrived in Paris the previous evening. From the beginning of the month, yellow shawls and green skirts, the costume of the Provinces, had been common at the *Bonheur*, so common that the clerks had ceased to laugh at them. Favier accompanied Madame Bontarel into another department, and when he returned, he said to Hutten:

"Yesterday they were all Auvergnates, to-day they are all Provençales; they make me sick."

But Hutten rushed away, it was his turn, and he had recognized "the pretty woman," as the clerks called her—for they did not know her name—although she was at the *Bonheur* certainly once a week. She had always been alone until this day, when a little boy was with her.

"She is married then?" said Favier, when Hutten came back from the cashier's desk with the bill for twenty-five yards of satin duchesse.

"Very likely, but I don't see that the imp proves anything. He may belong to a friend. One thing is certain, though, she has been crying."

A long silence followed. The two salesmen looked far down the shop. Then Favier said in a low voice:

"If she is married, I am sure her husband has beaten her."

"Very likely!" repeated Hutten, "though it may be a lover, you know."

Then there was another long silence:

At this moment Denise crossed the silk-room, walking very slowly, and looking around with the hope of seeing Robineau. She did not see him, however, and went on. Presently she appeared again. The two salesmen were watching her.

"There is that girl again!" murmured Hutén.

"She is looking for Robineau," answered Favier, "they are always talking together."

"Oh! there is no harm in it. Robineau is too stupid for that! Somebody said he had gotten some work for her."

Hutén was meditating a little plan. As Denise passed he stopped her suddenly, saying:

"Are you looking for me?"

She became very red. Ever since the evening at Joinville she had resolutely refused to read her own heart. Whenever she thought of him, it was with the girl with red hair. Had she loved him? Did she love him? She shrank from asking herself these questions, which were so intensely painful.

"No sir," she replied, much embarrassed.

Then Hutén determined to tease her.

Do you wish some one to wait upon you? Favier, give Robineau to this young lady."

She looked at him steadily with the same sad eyes with which she received the wounding allusions of the saleswomen. Ah! it was cruel for him to assail her as the others did. And she felt more desolate than ever. Her face expressed such suffering that Favier, though by no means tender hearted, came to her aid.

"Monsier Robineau is in the packing room. He will come up for breakfast, undoubtedly, and you will find him here this afternoon, if you desire to speak to him."

Denise murmured her thanks and then returned to the cloak-room where Madame Aurélie was waiting for her in a state of white heat. "You were sent of an errand a half hour since," she said, "and where on earth have you been?"

The girl's head drooped, she thought that her cup of bitterness was now full. If Robineau did not return, all was over. She promised herself, however, to go down in the afternoon again.

Robineau's return had let loose a revolution in the silk room, where strong hopes had been awakened that his departure was final, and that he had left because he could no longer endure the annoyances they heaped upon him. At one time when urged by Vincard to take his shop, he had been almost persuaded to do so.

The mine Hutten had been for months laying under the feet of the second clerk, was on the point of exploding, and while Robineau was away, Hutten worked hard not only to injure the absent man in the estimation of his employers, but also to install himself in his place by showing great activity and zeal. He discovered many little irregularities and reported them, and submitted many plans of improvement in several minor directions.

The truth was, that the paramount idea of all the clerks was to dislodge the companion who was one step above them on the ladder, and take possession of his place. And this very struggle seemed to make the

whole machine go more smoothly and increase the sales and business of the *Bonheur*. Next Hutten was Favier, then next Favier was another, and so on to the end. And every one rejoiced that Robineau was done for.

Consequently, when that individual appeared, there was general discontent and disgust. The attitude of the salesmen was so marked and threatening that the head of that Department thought of sending Robineau into another room until things were in a better shape.

"We prefer to go away in a body," said Hutten, "if he is kept."

This whole affair bored and annoyed Bouthemont intensely, for his natural gayety of disposition was not calculated to endure this incessant quarreling. He really suffered in seeing these sulky faces around him, but at the same time he wished to be just.

"Let him alone," he said, "he does you no harm."

But protestations and denials greeted these words.

"Does us no harm! He is perfectly insupportable, nervous and fidgety, and so proud that he would wipe his shoes on us if we would allow him."

Robineau had whims and the nerves of a woman, with the susceptibilities and oddities of one. Twenty anecdotes were in circulation about him, one in particular about a poor fellow who had been made ill by his treatment, and others of customers whom he had humiliated by his remarks.

"Well, gentlemen," said Bouthemont, "I can take nothing upon myself; I will talk with the management, and that is all I can do."

The bell was heard for the second table; the sound came up from the basement, dulled by the heavy, lifeless air of the shop.

Huten and Favier went down, and found themselves in a crowd of clerks, who were coming from every direction to the narrow passage-way that led to the kitchen—a passage-way always lighted with gas, and always damp and unhealthy.

This crowd, without a laugh or a word, hurried on amid the rattle of dishes and a strong smell of cooking.

At the other end of the corridor they stopped short before a wicket—where the cook, armed with a big ladle and flanked by piles of plates, was distributing portions. When he stepped a little aside, the flaming kitchen could be seen behind his portly form and white apron.

"Upon my word!" muttered Huten, as he consulted the *menu* on a blackboard above the wicket, "the same stewed beef with *sauce piquante*, never a roast in this establishment! It is enough to kill one with their *bouilli* and their fish."

The fish seemed to be generally despised, for the dish was almost untouched.

Huten stooped a little and said, "Beef—*sauce piquante*."

With a mechanical movement, the cook thrust his fork into a bit of meat, and putting it on a plate poured over it a spoonful of the sauce, and Huten, half suffocated with the hot air he had received full in his face when he stooped in front of the wicket,

carried off his plate, while the words, "Beef, *sauce piquante*—beef, *sauce piquante*," followed him like a litany, while the cook kept steadily putting pieces of meat on plates and covering them with sauce, with the regular movement of a clock.

"This stuff is stone cold," grumbled Favier, whose hands felt no heat from the plate he carried with extreme care lest it should be jostled from his hands. Ten steps further on was another wicket with a zinc counter, on which stood small bottles of wine—bottles without corks, and still wet outside where they had been hastily rinsed off. Each man took one of these bottles, and then with difficulty made his way to a chair at a table.

Huten kept up a low, perpetual grumble.

His table, where he and Favier sat, was at the end of the corridor in the last dining-room. All the rooms were exactly alike, and had been a series of cellars which had been changed into a refectory, but the dampness of the walls caused the plaster and the paint to peel off, and the walls showed large patches of green mould. Past the narrow slits that did duty as windows, and opening on the street with which they were level, a constant succession of shadows cut off the pale daylight that penetrated the thick glass. In July and in December the heat of this place was just about the same—simply intolerable, with the air thick with the odors from the kitchen.

Huten was the first to seat himself; the table was fastened to the wall and covered with oil-cloth; on it were knives, forks and glasses indicating the places.

A pile of plates stood at each end, and in the centre was a huge loaf of bread pierced by a knife, the handle in the air. Hutten disembarrassed himself of his plate, and deposited his bottle, and then taking his napkin from a shelf which was the sole ornament of the walls, seated himself with a sigh.

"I am confoundedly hungry!" he said.

"Of course, we always are, when there is nothing to eat," answered Favier.

The table was rapidly filling up. It seated twenty-two persons. There was a great rattle of knives and forks at first, for these men were hungry after their long hours of fatigue. In the beginning, the clerks who were allowed an hour for their meals were permitted to go out for their coffee; consequently they dispatched their breakfast in twenty minutes, in order to get into the street. But it was found that it led to confusion; they returned in a state of excitement, which prevented their giving their entire attention to business. And the management decided that they should go out no more, and they could have coffee, if they desired it, with their breakfast for three cents the cup.

Consequently they now lingered over their meals, not caring to return to their counters until their hour had expired. Many of them read a newspaper, which they folded and supported against their bottles. Some of them, when the first pangs of hunger were satisfied, talked noisily, and generally of the eternal subjects of the bad food, the money they had made, and what they had done the previous Sunday and what they would do the next Sunday.

"And what about your Robineau?" said one salesman to Hutén.

The struggle of the silk room against their "second" as he was called, was of interest to all the departments. The question was discussed every night at the *Café Saint-Roch*.

Hutén, who was busy with his beef, answered :

"Robineau? Oh! he is back."

Then suddenly losing his temper, he cried out :

"Zounds! they have given me a piece of a donkey. Upon my word, it is simply disgusting!"

"Why don't you make a complaint?" asked Favier ;
"the meat has been kept too long."

The two men both continued to talk in this way. Deloche was seated at a corner of the same table, eating silently. He was tormented with an excessive appetite, which he was never able to satisfy ; and as his salary was too small to allow him to supplement these meals elsewhere, he cut huge slices of bread and swallowed the least savory dishes with an air of delight.

Consequently, all the table amused themselves with him, and one salesman called out :

"Favier, send your plate to Deloche. He likes his meat that way."

"And yours, too, Hutén. Deloche wants it for his dessert!"

The poor fellow said nothing, but shrugged his shoulders. It was not his fault, surely, if he were always hungry.

But this talk was quickly hushed ; a certain low whistle warned them that Mouret and Bourdoucle

were near. For some time the complaint of the employés had been so persistent, that the management thought it advisable to make a personal examination of the quality of the food. The cook received one franc, fifty centimes for each person, daily. This was expected to pay for everything—provisions, gas, charcoal and attendance—and yet they pretended to be greatly amazed when things were not good. That very morning, each department had appointed a delegate to take the complaints of their comrades, and to speak in their name. Consequently, every one held his breath to hear what was being said in the next room, which Mouret and Bourdoucle had just entered.

Mouret said the beef was excellent, and Mignol, indignant at this calm approval, said, "Eat a mouthful, and see if you can get your teeth through it," while Liénard said gently: "It smells badly, sir!"

Then Mouret began to talk most charmingly. He should himself prefer, he said, to eat dry bread, rather than to see his employés suffer, and would do all in his power to make them comfortable. Was he not their father?

"I promise you to look into the matter," he said, in conclusion, elevating his voice that he might be heard from one end of the room to the other.

The examination was over. The noise of knives and forks was resumed, and Hutten murmured:

"Yes, of course you will look into it. That is a nice phrase, but it does not mean much. They feed you here on old shoe leather, and show you the door if you do not like it."

The salesman who had already questioned him, now said :

" You were saying that Robineau—"

But a great clash of dishes drowned his voice. The clerks were changing their plates themselves, and the piles at the ends of the table were diminished.

When an assistant cook from the kitchen was seen approaching with large tin dishes, Hutten said :

" *Riz au gratin!* That is the crowning touch."

Some of the clerks liked this dish, however, and others, buried in their newspapers, hardly knew what they were eating. Every one wiped his damp brow, and the cellar was filled with a thick mist, while perpetual shadows passing the windows, threw their dark lines on the disordered tables.

" Hand the bread to Deloche," cried one young fellow.

Everybody cut his own slice, and then planted the knife in the crust up to the handle.

" Who will take my rice for his dessert?" asked Hutten.

When he had concluded this bargain with a small, pale youth, he tried to sell his wine; but no one wanted it, for it was execrable.

" I was telling you that Robineau had returned," he continued, while the talking and laughing was redoubled about him. " Oh! it won't last long. You know he carries on intrigues with the saleswomen, on pretence of procuring outside work for them."

" Hush!" murmured Favier. " Look there!"

And he glanced down the corridor, where Bouth-

mont was walking between Mouret and Bourdoucle, all absorbed in conversation. The dining-room of the head clerks and the "seconds" was directly opposite. When Bouthemont saw Mouret pass, he rose hastily from the table and joining him in the corridor, told the story of the troubles in the silk room, and asked what should be done.

Mouret and Bourdoucle refused to sacrifice Robineau, who was a man of great ability, and had been trained to his duties by Madame Hedouin. When he began to tell the story, however, of the cravats, Bourdoucle became angry.

"Was the fellow mad," he asked, "to procure outside work for the saleswomen? The House bought the time of these young ladies at a very high price. If they worked on their own account at night, of course they worked less well for the House during the day. This was plain; they were wearing themselves out and injuring their health which was not their own. The night was made for sleep, and they should sleep or they should be dismissed." "Watch them!" said Hutten, "they are getting mad!"

Each time that the three men as they walked up and down the corridor, passed the dining-room, the salesmen watched them and commented on their every gesture. They forgot their *riz au gratin*, in which one of the clerks had just found a porcelain button.

"I heard the word 'cravat,'" said Favier, "and you should have seen Bourdoucle's nose, it turned white!"

Mouret was equally indignant! For a saleswoman to be obliged to work at night, seemed an attack

against the organization of the *Bonheur des Dames*; who was the simpleton who found her salary, and the percentage she received on her sales, insufficient for her requirements?

When however, Bouthemont gave the name of Denise, he changed his tone and found excuses for her.

Ah! yes, that little girl,—she was not yet very clever, and she had responsibilities, he was told.

Bourdoucle interrupted him to say that "she must be sent away at once. She was too ugly to be of any real use;" he had said that in the beginning, and he seemed now to take especial pleasure in repeating it.

Mouret gave a little embarrassed laugh. "Good heavens!" he cried, "how severe you are! Can you never make up your mind to forgive an error? We will send for the culprit and give her a scolding, and really Robineau is the one to blame, for he knew very well that such a performance would be displeasing to the House."

"The master is laughing now," said Favier, as the group passed the door.

"Well!" said Hutten angrily, "I swear if they persist in keeping their Robineau, that we will make it hot for them, as well as for him!"

Bourdoucle looked Mouret full in the face. He was very angry, but he contented himself with a disdainful shrug of the shoulders that expressed comprehension and contempt.

Bouthemont resumed his complaints; the salesmen would certainly leave, and some of them were very useful. But that which seemed to annoy these gentle-

men most, was the rumor of the good understanding existing between Robineau and Gaujean; the latter, they said, was doing his best to induce Robineau to establish himself in the *quartier*, and offered him long credit in order to injure the *Bonheur des Dames*. There was a long silence.

Ah! Robineau dreamed of a battle, did he? Mouret became very serious; he affected great contempt, but avoided announcing his decision, as if the matter were really unworthy of consideration. He would see Robineau,—he would talk with him,—and then Mouret began to talk and laugh with Bouthemont, whose father arriving the previous evening from his little shop at Montpellier, had nearly choked with rage and astonishment when he entered the enormous hall where his son reigned. Mouret laughed as he described the old man who with true southern impudence pretended to believe that this sort of thing could not last, and such a shop must collapse sooner or later.

"Ah! there is Robineau," murmured Bourdoucle suddenly. "I sent him away for a few days in order to avoid a most deplorable conflict. Excuse my pertinacity, but things are in such a condition just now, that I must act!"

Robineau passed the group at this moment on his way to his table, and bowed.

Mouret said again:

"Very good, we will see to it."

They went away. Hutten and Favier looked after them, and when they were fairly out of sight there was an explosion.

It was really too much if the managers were to come down stairs while they were swallowing their meals. It would really be very agreeable to be watched while they were eating! The truth was, they had seen Robineau come in, and the smiles on the face of Mouret had made them very uneasy. They lowered their voices and sought for new vexations.

Then Hutten suddenly exclaimed :

"I am hungry, as I usually am when I leave the table."

Nevertheless, he had eaten his own and another dish of *confiture* which he had exchanged for his rice.

"Victor!" he cried, "bring me an extra—bring me some more '*confiture*.'"

The waiter had just finished serving the desserts. Then he brought coffee, and those who took it laid down their three sous. Several salesmen lounged away in search of dark corners where they could smoke a cigarette. The others sat in listless attitudes before the table piled with dirty dishes. They rolled up bread crumbs and told the same stories over and over again, no longer conscious of the heat and the odor of cooking. Leaning against the wall sat Deloche, stuffed with bread and digesting in silence, with his eyes watching the window. His recreation was to look at the feet of the passers-by every day after breakfast. There were stout shoes, heavy boots, elegant boots, high-heeled boots, dainty, slender boots, worn by women,—a constant succession of feet, without form or head.

"Already!" cried Hutten.

A bell rang, and he was obliged to yield his place

and make room for the third table. The waiter came with pans of warm water, and big sponges to wash off the oil cloth covers of the tables. The dining-rooms were slowly vacated, the salesmen returned to their counters with a slow, reluctant step, and the cook had taken his place once more before the wicket ready to resume his monotonous motion of filling the plates.

As Hutten and Favier lingered, they saw Denise coming down the stairs.

"Monsieur Robineau has returned, Mademoiselle," said Hutten, with exaggerated politeness.

"He is, however, still at the table," said the other, "but that does not matter, you can follow him there."

Denise did not reply, nor even turn her head, nevertheless as she passed the dining room she could not refrain from glancing in; Robineau was there to be sure. She would try to see him that afternoon, and she continued her way down the corridor to her table, which was quite at the other end.

The women ate by themselves in the reserved rooms. Denise entered the first, which as well as the other had once been a cellar and was now transformed into a refectory. This place, however, was much more comfortable than the hall where the men dined.

On the oval table in the centre of the room, the fifteen plates were laid with amazing regularity and the wine was in carafes, a dish of "*raie*," and one of beef at either end. Two waiters in white aprons waited on these ladies and saved the annoyance of their taking their portions from the wicket. The managers thought this arrangement much better.

"You have been round the shop, have you?" asked Pauline, who was already seated and eating bread.

"Oh!" answered Denise, with a blush. "I was with a customer."

She was telling a falsehood. Clara touched the elbow of a saleswoman next her. "What on earth is the matter with the milk maid? she was really very odd. All at once she had received a letter from her lover, and then she ran through the whole shop like a crazy woman. There was something going on." Then Clara, while eating the dish before her with the indifference of a girl who had been brought up on rancid lard, began to talk of a frightful tragedy of which the newspapers were full.

"You read it," she said, "the story of a man who cut his wife's throat with a razor."

"And why not?" asked a delicate looking girl, "he found her with another man."

But Pauline uttered an exclamation of horror.

"What if a woman did not love her husband, did that give him the right to cut her throat?" Then interrupting herself, she turned toward the waiter:

"Pierre, I can't swallow the beef, tell them to send me an extra, an omelette, and let it be soft inside."

While waiting, as she always carried dainties in her pocket, she pulled out some chocolate which she began to munch with her bread.

"A man like that would not be a very pleasant companion," Clara resumed. "But some of them are so jealous! Why, only the other day, a workman threw his wife out of the window."

She watched Denise as she spoke, and fancied that the girl turned pale. It was plain that this milkmaid was afraid of having her face slapped by her lover, whom she had undoubtedly deceived. It would be a good joke if that delightful event took place in the shop.

But there was a change in the conversation, they talked of a new piece at the theatre, where little girls danced better than grown people.

Pauline, momentarily saddened by the sight of her over-done omelette, resumed her gayety when she found that it was at least eatable.

"Give me the wine," she said to Denise. "You ought to order an omelette too."

"Oh! the beef will do well enough," answered the young girl, who never ordered any extras, because she did not wish to spend a sou, and adhered strictly to the food furnished by the house, however repulsive it might be.

When the waiter brought the *riz au gratin*, these girls protested as with one voice. They had the previous week all refused to eat it, and had hoped they never would see it again.

Denise—thoughtful and anxious, made still more so by the stories told by Clara, which she with childish folly associated with Jean—was the only one who touched it, and the others looked at her with an air of intense disgust. Each of the others ordered extras and gorged themselves with *confitures*.

"You know very well," said the pale-faced girl, "that the managers promised—"

She was interrupted by loud laughter. "What

was the use of repeating what the managers had promised?"

All but Denise ordered coffee. She could not stand it, she said.

The others lingered over their coffee, the women from the *lingerie* room, in their simple woolen costumes, and the saleswomen from the cloak department in their robes of silk with their napkins tucked carefully under their chins. It was as if ladies had descended to the servants' quarters to eat with their maids. The windows outside the gratings had been thrown open in order to change the stifling, ill-smelling atmosphere. But it was necessary to close them again at once, as the wheels of the carriages seemed literally passing over the table.

"Hush!" whispered Pauline, "here is that old beast!"

It was Inspector Jouve of whom she spoke; he was sure to appear at the end of every meal, in the dining-room. His excuse was a good one, as he had the supervision of the rooms. He always entered with beaming smiles, and made the tour of the tables. Sometimes he asked if they had breakfasted well, and wanted to talk. But as the saleswomen were afraid of him, they were not disposed to linger. On this occasion, Clara fled at the first sound of the bell, and the others followed, so that very soon only Denise and Pauline were left. The latter, after drinking her coffee, finished her chocolate pastilles.

"I mean to send for some oranges," she exclaimed, hastily rising; "are you coming?"

"In a minute," answered Denise, nibbling at a crust of bread, for she was determined to stay to the last with the hope of seeing Robineau.

Nevertheless, when she found herself alone with Jouve, she was uncomfortable, and hastily left the table. But as she moved toward the door he stepped forward and barred her passage.

"Mademoiselle Denise," he began.

Standing before her he assumed a paternal air. His thick, gray moustache, his short cut hair, gave him a military aspect, and he threw out his broad chest on which shone his red ribbon.

"What is it?" she asked, momentarily reassured.

"I surprised you, this morning, talking with your friend in a corner up-stairs. You know it is against the rules, and I ought to report you. You and your friend Pauline seem to be very fond of each other."

There was a lurid light in his eyes which renewed the girl's uneasiness.

He went still closer to her.

She answered hastily, drawing back:

"Yes, we were talking together, and did not mean any harm. I thank you for not reporting us."

"I ought not to be so kind to you; do you know that justice is justice? only when a girl is so pretty—" And he moved closer to her. Her uneasiness changed to positive fear. She remembered Pauline's hints, and also certain stories she had heard of how some of the saleswomen had purchased Jouve's silence. In

a shop itself his demonstrations were confined to
ng the smooth cheeks of the girls with his clumsy

fingers, taking the hands of those who would permit it and retaining them as if he had forgotten that he held them. He was altogether paternal, and the wild beast was let loose only when he gave a little supper in his rooms in the Rue des Moineaux.

"Let me pass," said the girl, drawing back.

"Come," he said, "you surely don't mean to be cross to such a good friend as I? Be amiable, and come and take supper with me to-night."

He laid his hand on her shoulder. She drew back and tried to pass, as she declined his invitation.

The dining-room was empty; the waiter was at some distance down the corridor. Jouve, listening cautiously and looking around, threw aside his air of paternal familiarity and stooped to kiss her.

"You little scamp!" he said, "with hair like that, you have no right to be so stern. Come and take supper with me to-night."

But feeling his hot breath on her face, the girl in a spasm of reckless fear, lifted both her hands and pushed him from her with so much energy that he staggered and fell against the table. Fortunately, a chair received him, but a glass of wine was spilled and bespattered his immaculate white cravat and his red ribbon. He sat there choking with rage, wonder-struck at the girl's roughness. What on earth did she mean, when he had been so good to her?

Presently he gasped out:

"You shall repent of this; yes, I swear you shall!"

Denise fled. She forgot Robineau in her trouble

and went directly back to her Department, and of course did not dare leave it again.

As the sun lay in the afternoon on the front of the shop, the rooms were stifling in spite of the awnings of gray linen. Some few customers came in, put the saleswomen to a great deal of trouble, and bought nothing. Everybody was yawning under the sleepy eyes of Madame Aurélie. Finally, about three o'clock, Denise glided gently away and down to the lower floor. At first she pretended to have business at the lace counter, and stopped to ask Deloche some questions. Then leaving him, she went on toward the counter where cravats were sold. Turning an angle suddenly, she stopped short in surprise. Jean stood before her.

"What!" she exclaimed, turning very pale, "is that you?"

Jean wore his blouse and was bare-headed, his pretty fair curls were all ruffled by the wind. He was standing in an attitude of profound reflection, looking down on a case of narrow black cravats.

"What are you doing here?" she said, as soon as she could speak.

"I am waiting for you," was the prompt reply. "You told me not to come here, I know, but I haven't spoken to a soul! You need not look as if you had ever seen me, if you don't wish to, you know."

Some of the salesmen were nevertheless watching this strange pair with a look of wondering amusement, and Jean dropped his voice.

"You know she wished to come in too. She is on

the square near the fountain. Give me the fifteen francs as quick as you can. We are lost without them—it is true, as true as the sun is shining."

Denise was overwhelmed with consternation. Everybody was looking at them with contemptuous sneers. As a staircase led to the basement just at this corner she gently pushed her brother toward it. At the foot of the stairs he began to tell his story again, but in an embarrassed way, for he was afraid that he would not be believed.

"The money is not for her. Oh! no, she is above that! Her husband, too, would scorn to accept them. No, it is for a friend of hers who has seen us together, and if we do not give her the fifteen francs this very evening—"

"That will do," murmured Denise. "Come this way, quick."

They were now in the room where packages were sent out, but this being the dull season the vast place was a solitude. It was even chilly there. One man was in a distant corner doing up some bundles for the *Quartier de la Madeleine*, and on the table near him, Campion, the head of this Department, was sitting with his legs dangling.

Jean began again.

"The husband has a big knife—"

"Hush!" repeated Denise, still hurrying him on. They followed one of the narrow corridors, where the gas was kept constantly burning. A reserve stock of merchandise was piled up in all the dark corners. Finally she stopped in one of the most obscure. She

did not think any one would come, but as what she was doing was positively against the rules she was very nervous.

"If that toad of a woman should betray our secret," Jean began again, "the husband has a great knife—"

"Where on earth do you think I can get fifteen francs?" asked Denise desperately. "Pray be more reasonable. Why do such strange things constantly happen to you?"

He struck himself on his breast. His inventive talent and his love of romance was so great that he was no longer able to distinguish truth from falsehood. He simply dramatized his pressing needs for money.

"I tell you by all that is sacred, that I am speaking the truth. I was kissing her when that toad of a woman—"

His sister, tortured beyond endurance, silenced him again.

"I will not hear one other word about it. Keep your bad conduct to yourself. You are killing me by inches. How can I give you money continually? Such nights as I pass! And don't you see that you are taking the bread out of your brother's mouth?"

Jean became deadly pale. He had never realized all this, and it seemed perfectly natural that he should empty his heart to his sister; it made him for the moment very unhappy to hear that he caused her such wretched nights, and that he was stealing the bread from the mouth of little Pépé.

He began to weep somewhat boisterously.

"You are right. I am a rascal!" he cried. "And

I mean to put an end to all this; she laughs because I am only seventeen. I am so angry with myself!"

He took his sister's hands and covered them with tears and kisses.

"Give me the fifteen francs, and I swear that I will never ask you for another sou. No, don't give them to me; it is much better that I should die. If the husband murders me you will be well rid of me."

And as she too now began to sob, he felt a pang of remorse.

"I say this, but perhaps there is no danger. Perhaps no one will be killed. We will arrange it, sister, somehow. Good-bye."

They heard a sound of footsteps at the end of the corridor. She pushed the lad further into the shadow, and held her breath. For a minute they heard nothing but the hissing of the gas-burner near them. Then the steps came nearer and nearer, and reaching a little forward, she saw Inspector Jouve coming down the corridor with his usual pompous air. Was it accident that led him in this direction? Had some one up-stairs told him that she had been seen going into the basement? She trembled from head to foot, and in her terror lost her head completely, and pushed Jean out of the corner where they were, saying:

"Run! Run for your life!"

And driving him before her, they both fled like the wind, with Inspector Jouve puffing and panting behind them. They reached the foot of the steps which led to the *Rue de la Michodière*.

"Run!" repeated Denise. "Run for your life. If I can I will send you the fifteen francs all the same."

Jean obeyed. And when, all out of breath, the Inspector arrived on the scene, he simply caught the gleam of the white blouse and the blonde curls as the lad dashed around a corner. Jouve stood still, trying to regain his usual serenity of deportment. Thanks to the shop he had assumed a new white cravat, which was really quite superb.

"Very good, Miss," he said with trembling lips. "This is very proper, very proper, indeed. If you think I will put up with such goings on in this basement, you are very much mistaken."

And he followed her as she, with her heart in her mouth, dragged her weary limbs up the stairs. She attempted no explanation, although she had begun to realize the folly of which she had been guilty. Why had she not explained? Why had she not shown her brother? Now she would be accused of all sorts of terrible things, and it would not be of the smallest use to say one word. She would not be believed. Again she forgot Robineau and returned to the cloak-room.

Without a moment's delay, Jouve went to the manager's room to make his report. But he was told that the manager was busy with Monsieur Bourdoucle and Monsieur Robineau, they had been talking for some time. The door, however, was a little open and Mouret was heard laughing.

"You want something, Jouve," cried Mouret, "come in."

But a subtle instinct warned the inspector. Bour-

doucle coming out at that moment, Jouve decided to make his report to him.

The two men walked slowly down the gallery side by side, one talking, and the other listening without the smallest variation of expression on his stern face.

"Very well," he said at last, just as they reached the cloak room. Madame Aurélie was at the same moment greatly vexed with Denise. Where had she been? These perpetual absences could not be tolerated.

"Madame Aurélie!" called Bourdoucle.

He had made up his mind what to do. He would not consult Mouret, for fear of some weakness on his part. The head clerk told Madame Aurélie in a low voice, the story as he had heard it from Jouve. All the saleswomen waited eagerly, scenting the impending catastrophe.

At last Madame Aurélie turned and said in a solemn tone:

"Mademoiselle Denise—"

And her imperial face assumed all the stern, inexorability of the all-powerful.

"You are wanted at the desk!"

This terrible phrase was uttered in a voice that rang through the large room, where there was, this hot summer's day, not a single customer.

Denise stood silent and very white. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"I! And why? What have I done?"

Bourdoucle answered coldly that the question was needless, she knew very well, and she had best not p

voke an explanation. He then made some allusion to cravats, and asked what sort of a reputation the *Bonheur* would have if the saleswomen received their lovers in the basement.

"But it was my brother!" she cried, passionately.

Marguérite and Clara began to laugh, while Madame Frédéric shook her head incredulously. The same old story! Always the brother.

Then Denise looked at them all, at Bourdoucle, who from the beginning had not wished her to enter the *Bonheur*—at Jouve who stood in the doorway, and from whom she expected no justice, and then at the girls who had not been won by these long nine months of faithful performance of her duties, and by her smiling courage. They were all glad to hustle her out of doors. And what was the good of struggling? Why should she wish to remain, since no one liked her there? And she went away without one word, without a backward look upon the room where she had so long struggled.

But, as soon as she was alone, a keener pang wrung her heart. No one loved her, and Mouret would hear this story from cruel lips. This thought changed her resignation into a determination that she would at least right herself in his eyes. Perhaps he would believe this infamous tale; shame brought a blush to her girlish brow, and she resolved to go to him and explain the facts, not with the idea that he would bid her stay, but simply with a longing that he should know the truth. All her fear vanished in a passionate

longing to see him, to speak to him once more before she left the House.

It was nearly five o'clock and the shop was a trifle cooler. She went quietly toward the manager's room, but when she reached it she stopped short, overwhelmed with a sudden sense of the inutility of any effort on her part. Her tongue felt thick and unmanageable. He would not believe her, he would laugh at her as the others had done. No, she would make no explanation to him, she would disappear quietly. Then, without a word to Pauline or Deloche, she went to the desk.

"Mademoiselle Denise," said the cashier, "twenty-two days are due to you, that is eighteen francs and seventy centimes, to which seven francs as commissions are to be added. This agrees with your own account, I suppose?"

"Yes sir, thank you."

And Denise went away with her money. Suddenly she found herself face to face with Robineau. He had already heard of her dismissal, and gladly promised to see the woman from whom she had taken the cravats to make. He did his best to console her, and became very angry as he talked. What a life it was! to be at the mercy of a caprice, liable to dismissal at any hour without even a month's notice, or a month's salary. Denise then went up-stairs to tell Madame Cabiou that she would try to send for her trunk that evening. The clock struck five just as she stood on the sidewalk outside the door of the *Bonheur*. She was utterly bewildered and did not know where to turn.

That same evening, when Robineau went home, he received a letter, informing him in five brief lines that the managers of the *Bonheur* saw themselves obliged, for reasons of their own, to relinquish his services.

He had been seven years in the house, and that very afternoon had talked familiarly, indeed confidentially, with these gentlemen.

Huten and Favier were as delighted, and triumphed as openly in the silk department, as Margu rite and Clara did up-stairs. Good riddance! Pauline and Deloche were the only persons who felt any regret, and when they met, they lamented the departure of the gentle creature Denise.

"Ah!" said the young man, "I hope she will succeed somewhere else, and then that she will come back here and fill these people with envy!"

It was Bourdoucle, however, who bore the shock alone of an interview with Mouret. When that gentleman heard of the sudden dismissal of Denise, he was intensely irritated. As a rule, he troubled himself very little about the staff of *employ es*; but this time he spoke of arbitrary exercise of power, and of Bourdoucle having exceeded his authority. Was he not himself the master? How happened it that others ventured to give orders? He would not allow such interference!

He made a personal investigation, and then fell into a new rage. "The girl had spoken the truth," he said, "Campion had recognized the lad. Why, then, should she have been dismissed?"

He even talked of reinstating Denise.

Bourdoucle, unmoved in his attitude of passive resistance, listened quietly to all these outbursts. Finally, one day, when he saw Mouret calmer, he ventured to say, in a marked tone:

"It is better for everybody, that she has gone."

Mouret flushed deeply, but did not speak for a moment.

Presently he said, with a laugh:

"Well! Perhaps you are right! Now let us go up stairs and see what is going on."

CHAPTER VI.

DENISE stood for a moment, stunned and dazzled. The sun was still intensely hot—for it was July, though five o'clock—and Paris was dazzling bright with its white walls and reflected light.

The catastrophe had come so suddenly, and she had been dismissed so abruptly, that she had not yet had time to ask herself where she should go.

Finally she crossed the Square, as if to turn down the *Rue Louis-le-Grand*; then she changed her mind, and went toward the *Rue Saint-Roch*. But she had another plan, and stopped at the corner of another street, which she suddenly decided to follow. She turned into the *Passage Choiseul*. Here she suddenly thought of her trunk; but when she was about to speak to a *commissionaire*, remembered she did not yet know where to send it.

Then she began to look up at all the houses, and watch for a placard with "Lodgings to Let" in the window. She saw the words but dimly, for she was still shaken by emotion. Was it possible that she was alone and homeless in this great city? She must, nevertheless, eat and have some place to sleep. She wandered about, through street after street, continually returning to those she knew best. She did this unconsciously, however, and was each time surprised

when she found herself before the *Bonheur des Dames*. Finally she tried to escape, by turning down the *Rue de la Michodière*.

Fortunately, Uncle Baudu was not at his door; the shop looked as if every one were dead within. No, she could not present herself before him, for in these last few weeks he had pretended not to know her, and she would ask no favors from him now, when precisely the misfortune he had predicted had overtaken her.

On the other side of the street, a yellow placard struck her eye—"Furnished rooms to let." It was the only one that seemed within her means, for the house had a most sordid aspect, and she suddenly remembered that it was the one occupied by the old umbrella-maker—the little two-storied place, squeezed in between the *Bonheur des Dames* and the *Hôtel Duillard*.

Old Bonnat, bearded like a prophet, with spectacles on his nose, was standing in the doorway, examining the ivory handle of an umbrella. Having a lease of the whole house, he under-let the rooms above to diminish his rent.

"You have a room to let, sir?" asked Denise, almost without reflection.

He lifted his eyes, set deep under beetling brows, and seemed greatly surprised to see her. Every one of these shop girls was known to him. He answered, after examining her neat little dress and her womanly, sweet face:

"Yes—but it won't do for you!"

"What do you ask?" said Denise.

"Fifteen francs monthly."

She asked to see the room, and standing in the narrow shop, as he still questioned her with astonished eyes, she told why she had been dismissed from her situation and that she could not consent to trouble her uncle. The old man took the key from a shelf in a back shop, a little dark room where he worked and slept, and where, through the one dusty window, a small courtyard could be seen.

"I will go first," said Bonnat, "lest you should fall."

He groped his way through the narrow corridor, and felt with his foot for the first stair. He began to ascend, giving her repeated warnings as he did so. There was a hole in one stair and a box of ashes in the corner of another. Denise, in almost absolute darkness, could only feel the dampness from the old plastered walls. At the first landing, there was a window on the courtyard, which threw a dim light on dirty walls and several doors, where the paint was worn off in patches.

"If one of these rooms was empty, you would do very well. But they are all occupied by ladies."

On the second floor the light became stronger, revealing all the sordid masonry of the place. A baker's boy occupied the first room, and the other was vacant. When Bonnat opened the door, he was obliged to remain outside while Denise went in. The bed stood behind the door, and left just room for one person to enter. Beyond, toward the window, there was a tiny chestnut bureau, a pine table and two chairs. The lodgers who wished to do a little cooking, knelt before the tiny chimney in which was a small furnace.

"It is a small room, to be sure," said the old man; "but there is a good view of the street." And as Denise looked up with some surprise at the ceiling over the bed, where the former occupant had written her name, "Ernestine," by moving a smoking candle up and down to form the letters, he added in a good-natured, patronizing way, "If I should undertake to repair, you see, I should never make both ends meet. This at all events, is all I have for you."

"It will do very well," answered the girl. She paid a month in advance, asked for sheets and towels, and at once made her bed, with a blessed sense of relief that she at last knew where she should sleep that night. An hour later, the *commissionnaire* she sent for her trunk brought it, and she was settled.

Then came two months of terrible poverty. As she could not pay Pépé's board, she brought him to her room, and he slept on a little cot-bed lent by Bonnat. She required precisely thirty sous per day, her rent included; she herself lived on dry bread that she might give a little meat to the child. She had ten francs in her pocket when she began in this place, and then she was fortunate enough to obtain her nineteen francs for her cravats from the woman who owed her the money. But when that was gone she had no prospect of more, for she could obtain no employment. She went to shop after shop; but it was the dull season and she was told to apply again in October. More than five thousand men and women wandered through the streets in the same condition as herself, having been dismissed from their situations.

She endeavored to obtain work, but in her ignorance of Paris, she did not know where to apply. Sometimes she obtained something to do, and then was cheated out of her money.

Sometimes she gave P  p   soup for his dinner, saying she had eaten hers before she came in; and then she went to bed with a dizzy head, fed only by the fever that burned her hands.

When Jean suddenly appeared in this wretched place he beat his breast, and called himself a rascal with such despairing violence, that she was obliged to lie to him. She sometimes gave him a piece of silver to prove that she had made some little savings. She never wept before the children. On those Sundays when she could manage to buy a bit of veal and cook it on her furnace, the little room rang with the laughter of children, who had not yet learned to know how hard it was to live.

Then Jean went back to his employer, and P  p   fell asleep, while she lay wide awake, dreading the next day.

Other fears, too, kept her awake. The two ladies on the floor below received late visitors, and sometimes a man made a mistake and came up the second flight of stairs to hammer at her door.

Bonnat told her never to answer, and the girl buried her head in her pillow to escape the frightful oaths that followed the knocks. Then her neighbor, the baker, was of a jocose turn of mind. He tried to speak to her, and even made a hole in the wall, that he might watch her. She hung all her clothes up, and put an end to his amusement. But she suffered most from the insults

she received in the street. She could not go out to buy a candle without hearing some vile proposition breathed in her ear; and these men pursued her into the dark alley, encouraged by the miserable appearance of the house.

Why, she asked herself, did she not do as her friend had advised, why did she not take a lover? She herself could not have explained why she resisted, attacked as she was by enemies within and without, by hunger and distress of all kinds.

One evening Denise had not even a bit of bread for P  p  , when a well-dressed man, wearing a decoration on his breast, accosted her. He followed her to the door, which she with intense loathing shut in his face.

When she reached her room, she sank on the floor all in a heap. P  p   was asleep; what should she say if he awoke and asked for food? And yet she knew if she had allowed that stranger to follow her up the stairs, her poverty would have been at an end; she would have had gold and fine clothes.

It was a simple thing to do, and the inevitable end, since she had been told that a woman in Paris could not live on her work.

But her whole being protested; she reproached no one else, but it was simply impossible for her to do the same. It was not her idea of life.

Denise often wondered what her fate would be. An old song continually haunted her, about a girl who, loving a sailor, was preserved from all the danger of his long absence by the intensity of her love. She asked herself if she cared for any one, and if this was why she was so brave.

She thought of Hutten uneasily. She saw him pass night and morning. He had been promoted to Robineau's place. He never looked up, and sometimes she felt a little distressed that she could watch him without fear of being observed.

As soon, however, as she saw Mouret, who also passed each day, she shrank back trembling from head to foot. She did not wish him to know where she lived. She was ashamed of the house, and dreaded lest he should think worse of her for living there. And this she could not endure, although in all probability they would never speak to each other again.

Denise, moreover, was by no means beyond the influence of the *Bonheur des Dames*. A simple wall separated her present room from the *salon* where she had served; and early in the morning she recommenced her day there as usual. As the hours wore on she realized the crowd in the shop, for every movement there jarred the old house in which she was living. Then, too, Denise could not altogether avoid meeting certain people. Twice Pauline had stopped her and offered her services; the girl had been forced to lie, to avoid a visit from her friend. It was with greater difficulty that she resisted the eager devotion of Deloche. He watched her so tenderly that he knew all her anxieties and cares. He watched and waited for her, and one evening, he entreated her to accept a gift of twenty francs, "as the savings of a brother," he added with a blush. And these meetings kept her constantly regretting the shop, and occupied her thoughts with the daily routine

of the life there, as much as if she were still employed in the *Bonheur*.

No one came to see Denise; she was, therefore greatly surprised when she heard a friendly knock one day. It was Colomban. She received him standing. He was extremely embarrassed at first, asked how she was. She wondered if her uncle, regretting his harshness, had sent him, for he still continued to ignore his niece when he met her, although he could not fail to be aware of her extreme destitution. But when she questioned the clerk, he appeared to be more than ever embarrassed.

No, he had not come from his employer, and finally he stammered out something about Clara. By degrees he became bolder and asked advice from Denise, with the odd notion that the girl could serve him with her old companion.

Denise at this spoke to the young man very plainly and reproached him for causing Geneviève to suffer, on account of a girl who was totally without heart.

He came another day, and finally took to coming quite often. He was happy in talking to some one who had known Clara, and in this way Denise was forced to hear still more about the *Bonheur des Dames*.

It was in the last days of September that the young girl found herself totally without money. Pépé was ill with a violent cold. He needed a good soup, and she had not even a crust of bread to give him.

One evening when utterly vanquished, and in that state which throws many a woman on the street, or into the Seine, old Bonnat knocked softly at her door.

He brought a loaf of bread and a milk-can full of soup.

"Here," he said, "this is for the boy. Don't cry so loud, it disturbs my lodgers," he added, in his usual rough way.

And when she thanked him with broken words and sobs, he said:

"Hold your tongue. To-morrow come and we will have a little talk together. I have some work for you."

Bonnat, since the terrible blow given by the *Bonheur des Dames* to his business, by themselves selling umbrellas and parasols, no longer employed any work-women. He did everything himself in order to keep his expenses down. He cleaned, served and repaired. His customers were now so few and far between that he needed little assistance. He was, therefore, obliged to invent work the next day when he installed Denise in his shop. He could not let people die under his roof, he said to himself, moodily.

"You shall have forty sous per day," he said, "and when you find anything better to do, you can leave me."

She was in deadly fear of him, and she hurried through her work, so that he had some difficulty in keeping her employed. He gave her breadths to sew and lace to mend. The first day she did not dare lift her head, she was embarrassed at having him so near her with his lion-like mane, his hooked nose, and his keen eyes under his shaggy brows. His voice was loud and harsh, and his gestures so energetic that the

mothers in the *quartier* terrified their children when naughty, by threatening to send for him. Nevertheless these same children never passed his shop without shouting some insulting epithet which he pretended not to hear. All his anger exhaled in his rage against the villains who dishonored his trade by selling base imitations of his wares, "things," he said "that dogs would not use."

Denise trembled, when he shouted :

"There is not a decent parasol handle made nowadays, there are plenty of sticks, but no handles. Find me a handle and I will give you twenty francs!"

This was his artistic pride; there was not a man in Paris who could make a handle like his, light and yet solid. He carved the round ball at the end with an endless variety of delicate designs; flowers, fruits, animals and heads were alike traced with freedom and power. A little penknife was all the tool he used, and he sat all day long at work on a bit of ebony, his spectacled nose bent close over his congenial task.

"Ignorant fools!" he said, "they buy their handles by the gross. I tell you there is no feeling for art—no artistic talent in these days!"

Denise soothed him. He wanted Pépé to come down and play in the shop, for he adored children. When the child went about on all fours, and the girl sat in her corner sewing with the old man in front of the window it made a very pretty picture.

Each day there was the same conversation and the same occupation. He insisted on talking of the *Bonheur*, and never wearied of telling over and over again

of the terrible duel that had been inaugurated between himself and his neighbors of the *Bonheur des Dames*.

He had been living in the house he now occupied since 1845 and had a year's lease at a rent of eighteen hundred francs, and as he received a thousand francs for his four furnished rooms, he got his shop for eight. It was a good bargain and as yet he had no reason to regret it. To hear him talk, one would think that his final victory had already been assured.

Suddenly he would stop in the full tide of his discourse, and exclaim:

"Can they carve such a dog's head as that?" and he half shut his eyes behind his spectacles to judge of the head he was carving. It was simply wonderful in its spirit, with its lips curled down and the angry look in its eyes.

Pépé, in an ecstasy of delight, ran to the old man and leaning on his knee, petitioned to be taken up.

"Provided I can make both ends meet, I care about little else," said Bonnat, as with the point of his penknife he attacked the dog's tongue. "The rascals have cut off my profits, but if I don't make much, I lose nothing as yet, or almost nothing, and I have made up my mind to lose my very skin rather than yield."

He brandished his knife, and his white hair rose on his head with the angry wind he made.

"And yet," Denise ventured to say quite meekly, without raising her eyes from her needle, "if you were offered a reasonable sum, surely it would be wiser to accept it—"

Then his obstinate anger burst forth.

"Never!" he cried. "If my head were under the axe I should still say, never! I have ten years more on my lease, and they shall not have the house for ten years, not even if I die of hunger within these four walls. They have been to me twice already. They have offered me twelve thousand francs and the rent of my unexpired lease, in all thirty thousand francs. No, not for fifty thousand. Not if they lick the ground at my feet."

"Thirty thousand francs is a very nice sum," said Denise thoughtfully. "You might establish yourself in a better place. And suppose they buy the house?"

Bonnat, who had finished the dog's tongue and was contemplating it with intense delight, suddenly exclaimed:

"Buy the house! No, there is not the slightest danger of that. They talked of it last year, and would have given eighty thousand francs, double what it is worth. But the owner, who is as much of a rascal as they, was determined to make them pay. Besides, they are disturbed about me—they know they can't get rid of me! No, no—here I am and here I will stay. The Emperor with all his soldiers cannot dislodge me!"

Denise did not venture to breathe. She scarce dared draw her needle through her work, while the old man continued to vituperate.

"Strange things would happen," he said; "he had some ideas that would make their mark yet!" And every word he uttered was prompted by the revolt of the small manufacturer against the larger one.

Pépé ended by climbing on Bonnat's knees. He reached out toward the dog's head.

"Give it to me!" he cried.

"Presently," answered the old man, in a voice that suddenly became tender and loving. "Its eyes are not right yet. Let me finish its eyes." And as he worked he again addressed Denise.

"Do you hear the noise they make? Upon my word, it is enough to deafen one!"

He went on to say that his very table shook with the jar of the crowd that went in and out of the *Bonheur* all day long, while never a customer came to him. He was told that on a fine day they took ten thousand francs in the silk-room, but if it rained there were no receipts at all. The smallest noise he heard furnished him with matter for comment.

"Some one has fallen!" he cried, "ah! if they could all break their necks! And do you hear those ladies disputing? So much the better, my dear, so much the better! And do you hear the bundles going down the slide? Upon my word, it is disgusting!"

Then he went to comment on the abominable fashion in which Denise had been dismissed, and compelled her for the fiftieth time to describe all she had been obliged to endure at the *Bonheur des Dames*.

Thus it came to pass that from morning until night Denise heard of little else than this shop; it seemed to pervade the very air she breathed.

"Give it to me! Ah! give it to me," cried Pépé, extending his hands eagerly.

The head was finished. Bonnat advanced it and pulled it back with the gayety of a child.

"Take care—it will bite! Take it, but don't hurt it, I beg of you."

Then, pursued by his fixed idea, he shook his fist at the wall.

"You need not think you will have this house," he cried. "No, you shall not, if you swallow all the rest of the *quartier*!"

Denise now had bread every day. She was deeply grateful to the old man, of whose good heart she was fully conscious, in spite of his strange violence. Her great longing, however, was to find work elsewhere, for she saw him invent tasks for her. She knew that he did not require her services, for he had no business, and that he gave her employment out of pure charity. Six months had now elapsed, midwinter had arrived, the dull season again, and she was in despair, when one evening in January, Deloche, who was watching for her as usual, gave her a bit of advice. Why did she not go to see Robineau, who, it was quite likely, needed saleswomen.

In September, Robineau had decided to buy Vincard out, at the same time trembling to risk his wife's small fortune of sixty thousand francs. He had paid forty thousand francs to control a specialty of silk. This was not much, but he had behind him Gaujean, who would sustain him by long credits. Since his quarrel with the *Bonheur des Dames*, Gaujean had thought of nothing but of how he could injure it. He believed he could succeed, if in the neighborho

several specialties could be established where customers would have a larger choice. Only the wealthiest manufacturers of Lyons could accede to the requirements of these large shops, and Gaujean was not one of these. He had been established only five or six years, and he only furnished the raw material and paid so much a yard. It was this system which had prevented his struggling against Dumontiel in regard to the *Paris Bonheur*. He had never recovered his temper, and now snatched at Robineau as the weapon for a decisive battle.

When Denise presented herself, she found Madame Robineau alone. As the daughter of an Inspector of Bridges and Streets, she was absolutely ignorant of business, displaying still the charming awkwardness of a girl brought up in a convent at Chartres. She was a brunette, very pretty, with a laughing gayety that made her very pleasing. She adored her husband, and had no interest in life other than this love.

Just as Denise was going away, after leaving her name, Robineau came in and engaged her at once, one of his saleswomen having left him the night before to enter the *Bonheur*.

"It does not matter, though, now that I have you," he said, "for with you I shall feel tranquil; for you will not be inclined to leave me to go to them, as they have once treated you so badly. You can come to-morrow."

That evening found Denise in a great state of embarrassment. She did not know how to tell Bonnat that she was about to leave him. When she

began, the old man at once treated her as the most ungrateful of women; but when she defended herself with tears in her eyes, and told him that she was fully aware that he had never needed her services, and that he employed her only out of charity, he softened at once, called her a little story teller, and said that she was leaving him just at the moment when he was about to launch a new umbrella of his own invention.

"And Pépé?" he asked.

The child was now a great care to Denise. She dared not take him back to Madame Gras, and yet she could not leave him alone in his chamber, shut up from morning until night.

"I will take care of him," said the old man. "He is very happy in my shop, and we will keep house together."

She refused, unwilling to give him so much trouble.

"Zounds!" he cried, "do you think I shall eat him?"

Denise was much happier with the Robineaus. Her salary was small, only sixty francs per month and her board, but not lodging; nor did she have any percentage on the sales, as at the *Bonheur*.

But she was treated with great kindness, particularly by Madame Robineau, who sat at the desk, smiling and content.

He, however, was nervous, restless and anxious. At the end of a month, Denise was looked upon as one of the family. Conversation was never restrained by her presence, and business matters were openly discussed before her at table in the back shop, which looked out on a light, sunny court.

It was here that one day it was decided to open the campaign against the *Bonheur des Dames*.

Gaujean was dining there; and when the leg of mutton appeared, he brought up the question in his soft, Lyonnaise voice, thickened by the fogs of the Rhône.

"They can't keep things going long at this rate," he said, "for Dumontiel himself can't be making twenty centimes on a piece of silk. He works that his operatives may not be idle, for that, of course, would be his ruin. He has just sent three hundred pieces to the *Bonheur*."

Robineau laid down his knife and fork.

"Three hundred pieces," he murmured; "and here am I trembling when I take twelve, at ninety days. They sell much cheaper than we can afford to do. I have calculated that they are selling at an average of fifteen per cent. lower than we. It is this that is killing the small retailers."

He was in a most hopeless mood. His wife looked at him with tenderness. She knew nothing of business, and all these figures, she said, gave her a headache, and she did not see why people should take so much trouble to be rich, when it was so easy to laugh, love and be happy. Nevertheless, as her husband had resolved to conquer, she was determined to consecrate all her abilities to the same end.

"Why on earth don't the manufacturers form a league together?" resumed Robineau, violently. "They should make the laws, instead of submitting to them."

Gaujean asked for another slice of mutton, and then continued:

"Why, indeed! When a man has several manufactories, one might be idle for a day or two without any very great loss; but we, who employ men who often have two or three other trades, can control the production better than the larger manufacturers, who are often compelled to clear out their stock even at a loss. Consequently, they are on their knees half the time before the large dealers, and are ready to lose to obtain their orders. And then they recover themselves with your small establishment and others like yours. Heaven only knows how things will end!"

"It is simply abominable!" cried Robineau, angrily.

Denise listened in silence. She was secretly on the side of the great houses, in her instinctive love of logic and life.

A long silence followed Robineau's words, and she finally ventured to say, with an air of gayety:

"The public don't suffer, at all events!"

Madame Robineau laughed, which annoyed her husband and Gaujean. Of course customers did not complain, since they profited by the reduction in prices. Only it was plain that every one must live. What would the result be, if under the pretext of a general good result, the consumers grew fat to the detriment of the producer? Then came a long argument. Denise affected to be in jest, while at the same time offering very solid arguments. Intermediaries, she said, would disappear—agents and commissioners, who added greatly to the expenses. These large manufac-

tories could not exist without the large shops, for as soon as one among them lost its customers a failure became certain. There was a natural evolution in trade, and things could not be prevented from going as they ought to go.

"Then you take the part of those who turned you out of doors?" asked Gaujean, abruptly.

Denise turned scarlet, and was surprised at herself for doing so. What fire was in her heart, that a flame like this should flash to her brow?

"No," she answered, quickly, "no, I do not, and I really beg your pardon for speaking on a subject in which you are so much better informed than I. I only said what I thought. Prices nowadays, instead of being settled by fifty or more houses, are decided to-day by four or five, who have lowered them through the strength of their capital and the number of their customers. So much the better for the public, that is all!"

Robineau was not vexed. He had become very grave, and looked down on the table-cloth in silence. He had often felt this movement in trade—this evolution of which the young girl had spoken—and he asked himself, in his moments of clearer vision, if it were worth while to resist a current of such violence. Madame Robineau, seeing that her husband was very thoughtful, nodded approval at Denise, who had relapsed into modest silence.

"All these are theories," said Gaujean; "we had best talk business."

After the cheese, the maid served sweetmeats and pears. He took the sweetmeats and began to eat them.

with the artless gluttony of a big man who adores sweets.

"You must break them down on their *Paris Bonheur*, which has been the great success this year. I have been talking with my *confrères* in Lyons, and I have a most extraordinary offer to make to you. There is a black silk, a *faille*, which you can sell at five francs, fifty centimes; they are selling theirs for five, sixty, and by coming to you, they will save two cents on a yard, and the women will all do it, as you will see."

Robineau's eyes lighted up. In his continual nervous excitement, he often rushed in this way from despair to hope.

"Have you any sample?" he asked.

And when Gaujean pulled from his pocket book a small square of silk, he became much excited.

"It is infinitely better than the *Paris Bonheur*, or at all events, it has a better effect—the grain is so much coarser. You are right, we had best try it. I wish to Heaven I could bring them to my feet. I should keep them there some time, I assure you."

Madame Robineau, sharing these enthusiasms, declared the silk to be superb. Denise herself believed it would be a success. The close of the dinner was very gay, and these people talked as if the end of the *Bonheur des Dames* was near at hand. Gaujean finished the pot of sweetmeats, explaining as he did so, the enormous sacrifices which he and his colleagues were ready to make, in order that Robineau should be able to offer such a silk at such a price; but the

would ruin themselves, rather than allow these great shops to have their way. Coffee was now brought in, and the gayety of the little party was still further augmented by the arrival of Vincard.

He felt of the silk, and congratulated his successor.

"You will do for them, with that!" he cried. "Did not I tell you, you had a gold mine here?"

He himself had opened a restaurant at Vincennes. It was an old dream of his, fondly cherished while he trembled in this little shop, lest he should not be able to sell out before the crash came.

This idea of a restaurant had come to him after the marriage of a cousin, when he was astonished to hear the prices that had been paid for the various dishes at the wedding breakfast. And his round face was even now radiant whenever he entered the Robineaus', that he had washed his hands of this unfortunate business.

"And your aches and pains—how are they now?" asked Madame Robineau, courteously.

"My aches and pains?" he repeated, in an astonished tone.

"Yes, the rheumatism which tormented you so much."

He remembered now, and colored a little.

"Oh! it still troubles me; but country air has done wonders, you know. Never mind, you are in luck. But for my rheumatism, I should have retired with an income of ten thousand francs, before the next ten years had elapsed."

A fortnight later, the battle between Robineau and the *Bonheur* was fully opened. It became the talk of

the town. Robineau, borrowing the arms of his adversary, advertised in all the newspapers. He filled his windows with enormous piles of this famous silk, and had large, white placards everywhere, on which, in big, black letters, was the price—Five francs, fifty.

It was these figures that touched the hearts of the women—two cents cheaper than the *Paris Bonheur*, and really the silk was better in quality. Customers crowded to the shop. Madame Marly bought a dress which she did not need, on the score of economy. Madame Bourdelais thought the silk excellent; but she preferred to wait, probably with a very clear perception of what would happen. In fact, the very next week, Mouret took twenty centimes off the price of the *Paris Bonheur*. He had a long discussion with Bourdoucle and the rest—a lively discussion, to induce them to accept the battle and lose on the silk—for they were already selling at cost.

This was a terrible blow to Robineau, who did not believe that Mouret would lower his prices, for such suicidal acts are most uncommon. The flood of customers naturally went with the current that promised bargains, and went to the *Bonheur*, while Robineau's shop stood empty.

Gaujean flew off to Lyons, and had a terrified consultation there, which resulted in the heroic determination to lower the price of their silk yet another ten centimes. They would sell it for five francs, thirty, and if any one undersold them at this figure, it would be an act of the most utter madness. The next day Mouret's placards said five francs, twenty. Both me

were now incurring heavy losses each time that they made this present to the public.

Robineau replied by five francs, fifteen. Mouret then put up placards at five francs, ten. Customers laughed, enchanted at this duel between these rival houses.

Finally Mouret offered the silk at five francs, to the pale horror of his associates. Robineau stopped short. He could go no lower, and they both stood glaring at each other, over the ruins of their merchandise. But if his honor were safe, Robineau was none the less in a position of great peril. The *Bonheur*, with its enormous trade, could easily make up the losses; but it was vastly different with Robineau. He had only Gaujean to sustain him, and was daily slipping down the fatal hill of failure. He was dying of his own temerity, in spite of the great influx of customers, momentarily brought to his counters by his contest with the *Bonheur*. Not the least cruel of his secret woes was that of seeing these customers slowly leave him and return to his rival, after all the money he had spent, and all his superhuman efforts.

One day he lost his patience. Madame de Boves had come to see his mantles, for he had added *confections* to his specialty of silks. She could not make up her mind, and finally said:

"Their *Paris Bonheur* is the better silk."

Robineau had great difficulty in containing himself. He simply said that he thought she was mistaken. His manner was polite, but decided.

"But look at this circular," she said. "There is no

use in denying it. Their silk, at five francs, is like leather, by the side of this spider's web."

He did not reply. The truth was, he had adopted the ingenious device of buying the silk for his *confec-tions* from his rival. In this way, it was Mouret, not himself, who was the loser on the stuff. He had, of course, cut off the selvage.

"You think the *Paris Bonheur* thicker, then?"

"Oh! there is no comparison!" answered Madame de Boves.

This injustice was maddening, and as she was still examining the circular with a disgusted air, a bit of the blue and silver selvage, that had escaped the eye of the cutter, was seen under the lining. He could no longer contain himself, but spoke his mind plainly.

"Very well, Madame, this silk is the *Paris Bonheur*; it was bought at the *Bonheur des Dames*. Here is the selvage."

Madame de Boves went off full of wrath.

Many of his customers left him when they heard this story. And he amid this ruin, trembled only for his little wife, who had been brought up in a comfortable home, and knew nothing of poverty. What would become of her if he should fail and have only his debts left in the world! It was his own fault; he should never have touched her sixty thousand francs.

She did her best to console him; was not the money as much hers as his? She asked nothing but his love, and was ready to give him her heart and her life.

Denise heard them talking in the back shop in this

way. The fall of this establishment was slow but sure. Each day a certain progress was made toward failure. Only hope sustained them, while they constantly announced an impending crash at the *Bonheur*.

"Pshaw!" he said, "we are still young. The future is ours!"

"And then, too, what does it matter if you have done the best you could?" she answered. "If you are content, I am, dear love."

Denise felt strongly drawn toward these people, as she witnessed their affection. She trembled, for she was sure that their ruin was inevitable; but she dared not speak or interfere. It was at this time that she learned to comprehend the power of the new developments of trade which were revolutionizing Paris. Her ideas ripened; a womanly grace was developed in her face and bearing, and the country girl vanished forever. Her life was a pleasant one, in spite of her fatigue and inadequate salary. After spending the long day on her feet, she hurried back to P  p  , whom old Bonnat continued to care for and feed; but there was always something for her to do, a shirt to wash, a blouse to mend, while the noise he made with his sturdy feet nearly drove her wild. She never went to bed before midnight. Sunday was her day of hardest work. She cleaned her room and mended her clothes,—was so busy in fact, that she rarely dressed until five o'clock.

Nevertheless, tired as she was, she took the boy out for a long walk, sometimes as far as Neuilly; there they had a feast of fresh milk at a dairy, where they were allowed to sit down and rest.

Jean disdained these parties; he occasionally showed himself during the week, but did not stay long, saying that he had other visits to pay. He never asked for money, but looked at times extremely melancholy. His sister would then show her anxiety by her questions and generally gave him a five franc piece which she had saved up, sou by sou. This was her extravagance.

"Five francs!" cried Jean each time. "You are far too good. There is, to be sure, the wife of the paper-hanger—"

"Hush!" interrupted Denise. "I do not wish to know." He fancied that she was accusing him of boasting, and tried to explain, but she silenced him once more.

Three months elapsed. Spring had come again, but Denise refused to pay another visit to Joinville with Pauline and Baugh. She met them sometimes in the Rue Saint-Roch, when she came out of Robineau's.

Pauline, when one evening she met her alone, confided to her that she should probably marry her lover, —it was she who was hesitating, as at the *Bonheur*, they did not like their saleswomen to be married. This idea surprised Denise, and she did not venture to offer her friend any advice.

One day Colomban stopped her on the Square and implored her to ask her old companion, Clara, to marry him.

What was the matter with them all? Why should they torment her thus? She was thankful that she loved no one.

"You have heard the news?" cried Bonnat, when she went in one evening.

"No, I have heard nothing."

"The rascals have bought the Hôtel next door," and he waved his arms about, and his white mane rose in his rage.

"The Hôtel belonged to the *Crédit Immobilier*, and the President, Baron Hartmann, has sold it to that scamp Mouret. Now they have me on the right and on the left, as well as in the rear,—do you understand?"

He was quite right; the papers had been signed the previous evening, and the little house of Bonnat's clinging to the wall of the *Bonheur* like a swallow's nest, would be annihilated when the buildings were connected, for the Colossus would not be stayed by this trifling obstacle. Bonnat felt as if he were in the coils of a serpent. He seemed to hear the walls of his shop crack and diminish before his gaze.

"Do you hear those people?" he cried. "They are taking my walls away. Up stairs and in the cellar it is the same thing, as if saws were going through the plaster. They are trying to flatten me out like a sheet of paper, but I shall stay here all the same, even if they take off the roof, and the rain comes in on my bed."

It was at this moment that Mouret made new propositions to Bonnat. He offered to buy him out for fifty thousand francs. This offer redoubled the wrath of the old man; he refused with insults. "Did these scoundrels rob everybody so successfully," he asked, "that they could afford to pay fifteen thousand francs for what was not worth ten?" And he defended his shop as vigorously as an honest woman defends her virtue.

Denise saw that Bonnat was very thoughtful for nearly a fortnight. He wandered about restlessly, measured the walls of the shop, and then going out into the street, examined it with the air of an architect.

Finally one morning, a number of workmen arrived. The battle had begun; he really meant to fight with the *Bonheur* on its own ground by making concessions to modern luxury. Customers who had found fault with his dark shop should see it all bright with paint and plate glass. The façade was actually renovated, and the woodwork painted bright green. He even pushed his splendor so far as to gild his sign. Three thousand francs which the old man had carefully laid aside, vanished like dust. The whole *quartier* was in a state of excitement, and people came to see him amid his new surroundings. He did not feel in the least at home in this glittering frame, and as he sat behind the large window was not at all pleased to be seen, while he carved his handles or gesticulated wildly, as he talked.

The campaign against the *Bonheur des Dames* went on with him much as it had with Robineau. He had just launched his new invention, which later became very popular. The *Bonheur* at once seized and improved upon it. Then there was a contest in regard to the price. He had one style in *zânella* with steel wires, and ticketed "won't wear out!" It was sold at one franc eighty-five centimes. But he astonished his customers with his varieties of handles—bamboo, olive wood, myrtle and orange, while the *Bonheur*, less artistic, paid more attention to the covering

than the handles. And the bird of victory perched upon their banner.

The old man in despair declared that there was no artistic sense left in the world, and that he should continue to carve his handles for pleasure alone, without the smallest hope of selling them.

"It is my own fault," he said to Denise. "I never ought to have sold an umbrella at one franc ninety-five centimes. I might have known where such miserable truckling to new ideas would lead me. I followed the example of these brigands, and I deserve to fail."

July was very warm. Denise suffered intensely in her stifling little room under the slates. Consequently when she left the shop at night, she took Pépé into the garden of the Tuileries for a little fresh air, remaining there until the gates were closed. One evening, as she sat in the shadow of the chestnut trees, she started violently, for only a few steps away from her she saw a man whom, at a first glance, she took to be Hutten, but presently her heart began to beat, for it was Mouret, who had dined across the Seine and was now on his way to Madame Desforges. He noticed the movement Denise made to avoid observation, and recognized her in spite of the gathering darkness.

"Is that you, Mademoiselle!" he said.

Her astonishment that he condescended to stop, was so great that she did not reply. He smiled and tried to conceal his embarrassment under an air of amiable protection.

"You are still in Paris, then?"

"Yes, sir," she managed to stammer at last. She drew back as if to allow him to pass, but he continued to walk by her side. The air was cool and fresh, and the laughing voices of children followed them at a distance.

"This is your brother, I suppose," and his eyes were fixed on P  p  , who, quite intimidated by the appearance of this gentleman, clung to his sister's hand.

"Yes, it is P  p  ," she said, with a blush, for the question aroused the memory of the abominable falsehoods told by Clara and Margu  rite.

Mouret understood the cause of the blush, for he instantly added :

"Excuse me, Mademoiselle, I have apologies to make to you, and I should have been only too glad could I have expressed at an earlier date my regret for the great mistake that was made. You were accused far too lightly, and I wish now to say that every one at the *Bonheur* is to-day aware of the goodness and love you show to your brothers."

He continued to talk with a politeness and respect to which the saleswomen of the *Bonheur* were totally unaccustomed from him. Denise became more and more embarrassed, but her heart danced with joy. He knew the truth at last! knew that she had done no wrong. Neither of them spoke for some minutes; he still walked by her side, regulating his steps by the short, uneven ones of P  p  , and the stir of the great city was hushed under those old trees.

"I have only one thing more to say, Mademoiselle," he resumed. "If you ever wish to return to the *Bonheur*—"

She answered with feverish haste:

"No, indeed, sir. That is quite impossible. I thank you all the same, but I have found a situation elsewhere."

He knew this, for he had been recently informed that she was with Robineau, and he began to talk of her employer with tranquil ease. He was a very intelligent man, he said, but nervous and excitable. He would go too far, and a catastrophe was certainly impending. Gaujean had been unwise, and he feared both would suffer.

Then Denise, moved by his courteous familiarity, began to converse somewhat freely, and allowed him to see that she was on the side of these great establishments in the battle now entered upon, between them and the small shops. She became animated, and showed her familiarity with the question, and with broad and original ideas. He, greatly charmed, listened to her with surprise. He turned to look at her, trying to examine her face, though it was rapidly growing dark. She looked precisely the same, her face was as gentle, her costume as simple, but he was penetrated by a certain charm which he felt rather than saw. The girl had become a woman; this intoxicating Paris had done its usual work, and she was bewildering, in her own sweet way.

"Then, if you are on our side," he asked laughing, "why do you remain with our adversaries? Have I not heard, too, that you lodge with Bonnat?"

"A most excellent man!" she murmured.

"No, that he is not! He is an obstinate dunder-

head—a madman, who will compel me to turn him out of doors, when I would gladly get rid of him by offering him a fortune. You should not live in his house, child—people reside there who are contaminating.”

But as he saw the girl's confusion, he hastened to add:

“A woman can of course do right wherever she is placed, and it is all the more meritorious in her when she is not rich enough to choose her abode.”

He walked on a few steps in silence, Pépé all attention, for he was an extremely precocious child. Occasionally he looked up at his sister, whose burning, trembling hand astonished him.

“Listen to me a moment,” said Mouret, gaily. “Will you be my ambassador? To-morrow I mean to increase my offer, and to propose eighty thousand francs to Boninat. You must talk to him; first you must represent to him that his present policy is suicidal. He will perhaps listen to you, I am told that he sincerely respects you, and in this way you will be doing him a great service.”

“So be it, then!” answered Denise, smiling as she spoke. “I will execute the commission, but I have little hope of success.”

A long silence followed these words. They neither of them had anything more to say.

He began to speak of Uncle Baudu, but he stopped short, seeing the girl's uneasiness.

They continued to walk toward the Rue de Rivoli, and turned into a path which was still quite light. Coming from under the shade of the trees aroused

him to a sense of the impropriety of detaining her longer.

"Good evening, Mademoiselle."

"Good evening, sir."

But he did not go. As he lifted his eyes, he saw before him the lighted windows of Madame Desforbes who was waiting for him, and then turning toward Denise he saw her plainly in the twilight. She was a slender, girlish creature; why did she affect him so strangely? It was a mere caprice, he thought.

"This little boy looks very tired," he said, in order to say something. "Please remember that our House is always open to you. You have but to apply. Good night, Mademoiselle."

"Good night, sir."

When Mouret left her, Denise returned to the shadow of the chestnut trees. She walked along in an aimless way with a flushed face, and a brain all confusion.

Pépé, still hanging to her hand, trotted along at her side

She had forgotten him entirely, and finally he said:

"You are going too fast, little mother."

Then she dropped upon a bench, and as the child was really very weary, she held him on her knee and he fell asleep with his head pressed close against her virgin breast. She looked out upon the distance with a vague expression in her eyes.

An hour later when she entered the presence of Bonnat, her face had resumed its usual tranquil, sensible expression

"Zounds!" cried Bonnat, "that scoundrel of a Mouret has bought my house!"

He was entirely alone in the shop, and gesticulating with such violence that the very windows were in danger.

"Ah! the miserable wretch! The fruiterer has just been in to tell me, and do you know how much he has got for his house? One hundred and fifty thousand francs, four times what it is worth. Was there ever such a thief as that man must be, to be able to pay such prices? Will you believe that this Mouret told him that my improvements added greatly to the value of the house!"

This idea that his money expended in embellishments had benefitted the fruiterer, put the finishing touch to his rage. And now Mouret had become his landlord, and he must pay his rent to this man whom he hated so intensely. This was unendurable.

"Ah! I heard them at work on the wall all night; one might as well try to sleep at a railway station."

And he brought down his fist with such force on the counter that the umbrellas and parasols fairly danced.

Denise, nearly stunned, found that it was impossible to speak. She waited for the end of this crisis while P  p   fell asleep again on a chair.

Finally, when Bonnat was a little calmer, she resolved to execute Mouret's commission; the old man was certainly in a most irritable mood, but the very excess of his anger might lead him to give an abrupt assent.

"I have just met a person," she began, "yes,

person belonging to the *Bonheur*, who is thoroughly well informed. It seems that to-morrow they intend to make you another offer—eighty thousand francs."

He interrupted her with a roar.

"Eighty thousand francs! Eighty thousand francs! No, not if they would give me a million!"

She tried to reason with him. But as she spoke of his interests the door of the shop opened and she recoiled aghast and pale. It was Uncle Baudu with his yellow face and aged look.

Bonnat caught his friend by the button of his coat, and shouted out in his face:

"Do you know what they have the audacity to offer me? Eighty thousand francs. They are all leagued together, the bandits! They have bought the house, and they think they will buy me."

"Then the news is true?" said Baudu in his slow voice. "I came to find out."

"Eighty thousand francs!" repeated Bonnat. "Why not a hundred thousand? Money is no object to them. Do they think they will induce me to commit a rascality with their money? They won't succeed, I can tell you! No, never! never!"

Denise now spoke in her usual calm tone:

"They will have the house in nine years, though; when your lease expires."

And in spite of the presence of her uncle she implored the old man to accept.

The contest was useless, he was struggling against superior force, and could not without the sheerest lly refuse this proffered fortune.

But he vehemently repeated his "no." In nine years he hoped to be dead. They never should have it while he lived. And he took the most frightful oaths.

"You hear that, Monsieur Baudu, do you? Your niece is in league with them, it is she who is deputed to corrupt me! She sides with these brigands."

The uncle up to this moment had pretended not to see Denise, but sulkily looked over her head, as he always did when she passed, and he was standing in his shop door. But now he slowly turned and looked at her. His heavy mouth trembled.

"I know it," he said in a low tone.

And he continued to look at her. Denise, moved to tears, thought him sadly changed. He perhaps was thinking with dull remorse that he had extended no helping hand, when she was in such distress as that through which she had just come. Then seeing P  p   asleep on the chair, unmoved by all the mad uproar about him, he was touched.

"Denise," he said quietly, "come with the child to dine with us to-morrow. My wife and Genevi  ve have begged me repeatedly to ask you, if we two should chance to meet."

She blushed deeply and embraced him tenderly; and when B  du went away, Bonnat, quite delighted at this reconciliation, called out:

"Punish her, she deserves it. But please remember that I stick here until the house crumbles under my feet."

"Our houses are already crumbling, neighbor," said B  du gloomily.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE all the *quartier* were talking about the avenue that was to be cut from the Bourse to the new Opera House, to be known under the name of the Rue Dix-Decembre. Judgment had been rendered and workmen were at work, in two bodies, at the two ends, one pulling down the old Hôtel in the Rue Louis-le-Grand, the other throwing down the light walls of the old Vaudeville. The sound of the pick-axes was gradually approaching. Before a fortnight had elapsed the breach that was made inundated the whole *quartier* with sunshine.

But the people were still more interested in the work going on at the *Bonheur des Dames*. There was much talk of important improvements, and a building with three façades on the *Rue de la Michodière*, nearer *Saint-Augustin*. Mouret, they said, had entered into an agreement with Baron Hartmann, President of the *Credit Immobilier*, and would build on all these vacant lots except those where the Baron proposed to erect an addition to the Grand Hôtel. People were moving out in all directions, old Bonnat alone was unmoved and intact, obstinately wedged in between the two high walls now covered with workmen.

When the next day Denise with Pépé went to her uncle's, the street was crowded with carts, which were

unloading bricks before the old Hôtel Duvillard. Uncle Baudu stood in his shop door mournfully looking on. It seemed to the young girl that her uncle's shop had never looked so dingy and so dirty; the windows suggested a prison, and the whole façade was covered with green mould.

"Look out," cried Baudu, "they won't mind walking over you!"

In the shop, Denise felt the same sinking of the heart. She found it very dark and more drowsy than ever. Empty shelves made dark holes and the dust lay thick on the counters and the cashier's desk, while a cellar-like odor came from the bales of cloth which were never moved.

Madame Baudu and Geneviève sat silent and still at the desk, where no one went to disturb them. The mother was hemming towels. The girl, with her hands loosely folded on her knee, was looking out into space.

"Good evening, aunt," said Denise. "I am glad to see you again, and if I have ever caused you a sorrow, forgive me."

Madame Baudu kissed her, much moved.

"My poor child," she answered, "if I had no other sorrows than those you cause me, you would find me very gay."

"Good evening, cousin," said Denise, kissing Geneviève on the cheek.

The girl started and awoke as from a dream. She returned her cousin's kiss, and the mother and daughter embraced Pépé, who also extended his little arms.

The reconciliation was complete.

"It is six o'clock," said Baudu, "why don't we go to dinner? Where is Jean, by the way?"

"He ought to be here," answered Denise, much embarrassed. "I saw him this morning and he gave me his promise. Oh! you must not wait, he has probably been detained by his employer."

She expected to hear some extraordinary excuse from Jean, and she thought it advisable to anticipate it.

"Now then, let us have some dinner," repeated Uncle Baudu.

Then turning to a dark angle of the shop he said:

"Come Colomban, dine with us to-day, there will be no one in the shop."

Denise had not perceived the head clerk. Her aunt explained that they had been obliged to dismiss the other salesmen and the young lady also. Business was so poor that Colomban was all that was required, and he himself spent many unoccupied hours half asleep.

In the dining-room the gas was burning, although it was now the longest days of summer.

Denise shivered as she entered, for a chill seemed to fall on her shoulders from the wall. There stood the well remembered table, with its oilcloth cover, and the window open into the ill-smelling courtyard.

Everything here, as well as in the shop, looked darker and drearier than ever.

"Father," said Geneviève, suddenly annoyed for Denise, "shall I not shut the window? A vile smell comes in."

But her father did not perceive it, and looked quite surprised.

"Shut the window if you wish," he said, "but we shall certainly suffocate." Which was pretty nearly the case.

It was a family dinner, of frugal simplicity. After the soup, came the soup-meat with vegetables, and then the uncle began to talk of the people opposite. At first his remarks were quite mild, and he permitted his niece to indulge in an opinion opposite to his own.

"You are free, of course, to think as you choose. Everybody has a right to his own ideas. If you have not been embittered by being turned out of doors, it is, of course, because you have good reasons for liking these people. You will go back there some day, and then I shall never see you again."

"Oh! no," murmured Madame Baudu.

Denise quietly gave her reasons, as she had given them to Robineau—the logical evolution of commerce, the magnificence of the new creations, and finally, the welfare of the public. Baudu listened with raised eyes and parted lips. But when she finished, he shook his head.

"All this is the wildest fancy. Commerce is commerce, trade is trade; there is no getting away from that fact. I grant you that they will succeed, for I have long waited to hear that they have broken their necks; but these robbers make their fortunes, while honest men die on the straw. This is the honest truth, and I am obliged to yield to facts, and I do yield to them."

The old man had goaded himself into a terrific passion. He brandished his fork.

"But I will not be beaten. My old shop shall stand until it crumbles from old age. I told Bonnat some time ago, that his painting and gilding was a compact with the devil—"

"Eat your dinner, dear," interrupted his wife, uneasy at the state of excitement he was in.

"Wait! I wish my niece to know my intentions. I am as steady as this *carafe*, and I shall not budge. They will succeed; so much the worse for them! I can only protest."

The servant brought in a bit of roast veal. He began to cut it with his trembling hands; but his eye had lost its former accuracy, and he could no longer intuitively measure the portions. The consciousness of his defeat had deprived him of much of his former pomposity. As he had said, one force alone was left to him, that of innate obstinacy. He had resolved not to lift a finger, and to move neither to the right nor the left, to prevent the fall of his House.

Pépé supposed that his uncle was angry, and trembled. It was necessary to reassure the child, by giving him a portion of dessert and all the biscuit in front of him. Then the uncle tried to lower his voice, and talk of other things.

But presently the conversation veered toward the new street, of which he condescended to approve; it would certainly bring business to the *quartier*.

Then he began again to talk of the *Bonheur*. He said that the shop was virtually closed, because these stupendous carts blocked the way.

In spite of his wife's entreating eyes, he began to

estimate the trade of the House. Was it not extraordinary? In less than four years, they had doubled and quadrupled their capital; their annual receipts, formerly eight million, had now reached the cipher of forty. It was wonderful, the madness of these people, and now they were to extend operations and employ more saleswomen, as well as more salesmen. They intended to have several new Departments—one of articles exclusively manufactured in Paris. Verily, these people were not proud; they would soon sell fish.

The uncle, while affecting to agree with Denise, was in reality opposed to all her ideas.

"You cannot defend them. Would you like me to add a counter of saucepans to my business? You would simply think I was crazy. Admit that you have not much respect for their performances."

And as the girl smiled in an embarrassed fashion, for she saw how useless it was to argue, he continued:

"I plainly see you agree with them. We will, consequently, say no more about the matter, for it is most unnecessary that we should quarrel; that would be the last drop, to have them interfere between my family and myself. Go back to them, if you choose, but I forbid you to mention their names here again."

Then followed a long silence. His violence had given place to this feverish resignation. As the heat of the room was intense, the servant had opened the window, and the dampness and foul smells of the courtyard were pouring in. Some fried potatoes appeared, and were slowly eaten.

"Look at those two," said Baudu, pointing with his knife to Geneviève and Colomban. "Ask them if they like your *Bonheur des Dames*."

Side by side, in the same seats they had occupied daily for the last twelve years, sat Colomban and Geneviève. They had not uttered one syllable. He, exaggerating the heavy apathy of his face, seemed to veil with his heavy lids the interior flame that scorched him; while she, paler than ever, with her head still more bowed under its masses of black hair, seemed prostrated by some secret grief.

"Last year was a disastrous one," explained the uncle. "It was necessary to postpone their marriage. It was not a pleasant thing for them, you may be sure. Ask them what they think of your friends."

Denise, to please her uncle, interrogated the young people.

"I certainly have no reason to like them, dear cousin," answered Geneviève; "but do not be concerned, everybody does not detest them."

And she looked at Colomban. He was rolling crumbs of bread between his fingers, and seemed absorbed in thought. When he suddenly realized that his *fiancée* was looking at him, he burst out in violent expressions of wrath.

"A miserable concern! A set of scoundrels!"

"You hear that! You hear what he says!" cried Baudu, quite delighted. "He is one they will never win over. They have got the last of our family!"

But Geneviève with a pale, sad face, still continued to watch Colomban. Her persistent gaze disturbed

him, and he broke out once more in violent invectives. Madame Baudu looked from one to the other of these two uneasily, as if she foresaw trouble there. For some time she had been anxious about her daughter, whose pallor had become almost unearthly.

"The shop is alone," she said, at last rising from the table. "Look, Colomban, I think I heard some one there."

They had all finished by this time. Baudu and Colomban went to talk with a *commissionaire*, who had come to take orders. Madame Baudu took Pépé away with her, and the servant began to clear the table, while Denise stood looking out into the court-yard. Geneviève had not moved from the place, but sat looking down on the oilcloth cover, still damp from the sponge with which it had been wiped down.

"You are in trouble, cousin?" said Denise. Geneviève did not reply; her eyes were riveted on a crack in the cloth. Then she lifted her head almost as if it hurt her to do so, and looked up to this compassionate face bent over her. The others were all gone! What was she doing here? All at once she burst into a passionate flood of tears, and she threw herself half on the table, with her head on her arm. Presently her sleeve was quite wet with her tears.

"What is it!" cried Denise, in great trouble. "Shall I call some one?"

Her cousin snatched her arm and stammered nervously:

"No, no, stay here, don't let mamma know. I don't care if you know. It does not matter; but not th

others,—not the others! I could not help it when I saw myself all alone; wait here, I shall be better presently," and new sobs shook her frail form. It seemed as if the heavy masses of black hair weighed down her poor head. As she rolled it on her folded arms the pins came out, and the hair tumbled all over her shoulders, enveloping her in its darkness. Denise quietly tried to soothe the poor child; she unfastened her dress and was horrified at her emaciation. Denise gathered up her hair,—the superb hair that seemed to be exhausting her life, and knotted it firmly that it might not impede the air.

"You are very kind," said Geneviève. "Am I not thin? I was much stouter, but I lose flesh daily. Fasten my dress; mamma will see my shoulders. Alas! I am far from well! Far from well!"

She repeated these words in a tone of resignation. The crisis was passing away, and the sobs became less choking. She sat in a crushed and broken attitude on a chair looking intently at her cousin. Presently she exclaimed:

"Tell me the truth; does he love her?" Denise colored deeply. She was perfectly well aware that her cousin spoke of Clara and Colomban. But she affected great surprise.

"Whom do you mean, dear?"

Geneviève shook her head incredulously. "Do not lie, I beg of you. At least do me the service of telling me the truth. You ought to know it; I feel it. Yes, you have been the companion of this woman, and I have seen Colomban pursue you and talk to you in whis-

pers. He has given you messages for her. Tell me the truth. I assure you it will be of service to me."

Never had Denise been in so awkward and embarrassing a position. She dropped her eyes and Geneviève instantly knew the truth; but Denise made one desperate effort to deceive her cousin.

"But it is you that he loves," she said.

Geneviève made a despairing gesture.

"Very good, I see that you can tell me nothing. It does not matter, I have seen them. He is continually going out on the sidewalk to look up at her, and she nods and laughs back. Of course they meet at other times."

"I don't believe it!" cried Denise, carried away by her desire to give her cousin some consolation.

The young girl panted for breath, she smiled faintly, then in the weak voice of a convalescent, she said:

"Will you give me a glass of water? Excuse me for troubling you. It is there on the buffet."

When the *carafe* was handed her, she drank a large glass full, while pushing Denise aside, for her cousin was afraid she would make herself ill.

"No, no, let me have it all. I am always thirsty, I rise repeatedly in the night, for my throat is always parched."

After a long silence, she resumed, gently:

"If you knew how for ten years I have thought of this marriage. I was wearing short dresses when I first knew that I loved Colomban. I can hardly tell how it came about. We were always together the

had no outside distractions, and I almost looked upon him as my husband, and now he cares for another woman! Ah! my heart is breaking and I feel that I am dying."

Tears filled her eyes. Denise, whose lashes were also wet, said softly:

"Do you think your mother suspects?"

"She knows, I am sure. As to papa, he is in such perpetual anxiety, that he has no idea how much it has cost me to have this marriage so often postponed. Mamma has questioned me many times, and is evidently concerned, and thinks me ill. She is never strong herself, and sometimes she says, 'my poor child, if my own health had been better, you would have been stronger.' Then too, these shops are not very healthy. Do you see how thin I am? Look at my arms."

With a trembling hand she lifted the *carafe* again. Her cousin tried to take it from her.

"No, no, I am thirsty, let me be."

Baudu's voice was heard. Then yielding to her impulse, Denise knelt and surrounded her cousin with her tender, loving arms, kissing her, she told her all would go well and that she would certainly marry Colomban; her health would be restored, and all would be happy.

Her uncle called her.

"Jean is here; come, he wants you."

It was Jean, and Jean had come for his dinner! When he was told that the clock had struck eight he was utterly confounded; it could not be possible, he ~~seeing~~ must left his employer's. They all laughed at him,

but as soon as she approached his sister, he whispered in her ear :

"It was the little washerwoman who kept me, she is outside in a carriage now, I have had it an hour ; give me five francs quick."

He ran out and returned immediately ; his aunt insisted on his eating something, if it were only a bowl of soup. Geneviève reappeared, wrapped in her usual profound silence ; Colomban was half asleep behind a counter.

The evening passed slowly and sadly, enlivened only by the measured steps of the uncle, who slowly walked up and down the shop lighted by one solitary gas burner.

Months passed on ; Denise came in almost every day to brighten Geneviève. But the Baudus became sadder and sadder. The building opposite was a continual annoyance to them, and if by any chance they forgot it, a sudden fall of brick and mortar, or a mason's call recalled them to all the old bitterness.

The whole *quartier* was interested in the building. The architect was putting up a central gallery as large as a church, fronting on the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin ; at first great difficulty had been found in arranging the basements, for old sewers had been discovered and vast accumulations of human bones as well, but these obstacles had been successfully combated and the walls were now up as far as the second floor. Scaffoldings enclosed them all, from whence came a perpetual clamor of voices, hammering and the clatter of mason's trowels. But above all rose the

sound of machinery, for everything that was possible was done by steam, while with every puff of wind came a cloud of plaster, that fell on all the neighboring roofs like snow.

The Baudus watched this penetrating dust coming through their close shut windows, ruining their woolen goods, and the idea that they were themselves breathing it and that it was shortening their lives, poisoned every moment of their existence.

The situation was becoming more annoying. In September the architect, fearing that he could not carry out his contract, decided to work in the night. Powerful electric lights were set up, and the noise never ceased night nor day. The poor Baudus could get no sleep, and when, restless and miserable after tossing to and fro, they would rise from their beds and go to the window to calm their fever, they, raising their curtains, stood aghast before the sight of the *Bonheur des Dames* all ablaze, like a colossal forge. Electric lights dazzled and blinded them; as if fascinated, these poor dazed people lingered at the windows until the clocks struck two, three and four, watching the colossal work and the shadows of the workmen as they hurried to and fro.

As Uncle Baudu had said, the petty trade of the neighborhood was utterly ruined. Each time that a new branch was established in the *Bonheur*, there were new failures among the smaller tradesmen, and even larger shops now began to be affected. Mademoiselle Faten, in the Passage Choiseul, went into bankruptcy. Quinette, the glover, lingered a little longer, while

Bedoré and his sisters who sold stockings, were evidently living on their savings.

It was hard on the furniture dealers, who, however, affected to laugh at dry goods people, selling tables and wardrobes, but they saw their customers leaving them already, and the success of the new Department was evidently assured. Before long, they said despondently, the roof of the *Bonheur* would cover the whole *quartier*.

At present, when morning and night the thousand employés of the *Bonheur* went in and came out, people stopped to look at them, as one would at a regiment. For ten minutes the sidewalks were crowded, and the shop-keepers standing at their doors, thought of the one salesman whom they with difficulty paid and fed. The last declaration made by the *Bonheur* of forty million revolutionized the neighborhood. It was repeated from house to house with cries of surprise and anger. Forty millions! Think of it!

The net result must be at least four per cent. in spite of their enormous expenses. And they told how Mouret's original capital was but five hundred thousand francs, which had rolled up and up.

Robineau, as he made the calculation before Denise one day after dinner, was absolutely stunned. The girl was right after all; it was the constant turning over of capital that lay at the foundation of the invincible force of modern commerce. Bonnat was, nevertheless, unconvinced, and refused to recognize this fact. They were a band of robbers, that was all. A lying set! Charlatans, who would find themselves in the gutter

some fine morning. The Baudus, in spite of their desire to make no change in the old customs of their establishment, were compelled, as customers would not come to them, to send to the customers, through agents. There was one man on the *Place de Paris*, who was in communication with all the tailors, and who at this time came to the rescue of the small shops that sold cloths and flannels. He of course, had become a most important person, and none ventured to dispute his terms. Baudu, however, did so, and the man declined to undertake any further transactions in his behalf.

Two men whom Baudu subsequently employed, stole from him, and a third, who was honest enough, did nothing.

Baudu saw every customer and every means of support slowly slipping from him, and finally debts began to accumulate. In December he was so startled by the number of his notes out, that he resigned himself to the most cruel of sacrifices; he sold his country house at Rambouillet,—a house that had been a continual bill of expense to him, and for which he had never been able to procure a steady, reliable tenant.

This sale ended the one pleasurable dream of his life, and his heart bled over it as at the death of a loved one.

He sold for seventy thousand francs, this property which had cost him over two hundred thousand. He was fortunate in selling it at all, and did so because Madame Aurélie, who was his next neighbor, wished to add to her estate. This seventy thousand francs

would enable them to keep up the battle some time longer, for in spite of everything, Baudu was by no means disposed to relinquish the contest and acknowledge himself beaten.

The Sunday that Madame Aurélie paid the money they were to dine with the Baudus. She was the first to appear, but her husband was late, having been enticed away by an afternoon of music. Young Albert had accepted the invitation, but did not come.

It was a most painful evening. The Baudus living without air in their close dining-room, were crushed by the L'Hommes, who were accustomed to freedom and a certain amount of out-of-door life. Geneviève, wounded by Madame Aurélie's magnificence, did not open her lips, while Colomban sat awed and thrilled by the thought that she reigned over Clara. Before going to bed that night, Baudu paced his room for an hour. It was cold and raining, but through the closed windows came the perpetual sounds made by the workmen.

Madame Baudu was in bed.

"Do you know what I am thinking, Elizabeth?" he said at last. "These L'Hommes are making a great deal of money. I know that, but I would rather be in my skin than theirs. They are succeeding, it is true. Did not that woman say that she had made seventy thousand francs this last year, and was therefore, able to buy our house? But all the same, they are not happy." He was still suffering from the sacrifice he had made, and felt a sudden rancor against these people who had marred his beautiful dream.

When he reached the bed he stopped and gestic-

lated, and when he reached the window he stood there to listen to the clamor of the workmen. He resumed his old complaints, and the expression of his despair and wonder at the new fashions in which business was carried on. Who had ever heard of such a thing as saleswomen making money in this way, enough to buy the property of the employers! There was no such thing either as family ties; people lived at Hôtels in these days, instead of eating their meals under their own roofs. He ended his discourse by the assertion that Albert would devour the estate at Rambouillet with his actresses.

Madame Baudu listened with her head on her pillow and her face as white as the linen about it.

"They have paid you, at all events," she said gently.

Baudu stopped short, and stood with his eyes on the ground for a minute.

"Yes," he said at last, "yes, they have paid me, and their money of course is as good as that of any one else. It would be a good joke if I were to build up this House again with that money. I would try it, were I not so old and so worn out." A long silence reigned. The draper was absorbed in vague projects. Suddenly his wife spoke with eyes riveted on the ceiling:

"Have you noticed your daughter lately?"

"My daughter? No,—" he answered.

"Well, she makes me very uneasy. She is always pale, always weary, and seems in terribly low spirits."

He went nearer the bed, and exclaimed in surprise:

"What is the matter with her? If she is ill she ought to say so and have a doctor."

Madame Baudu did not speak for a moment, and then said in her usual quiet manner:

"I think it would be wise if this marriage took place immediately."

He looked at her and then turned on his heel and walked away. Was his daughter ill, was she unhappy because this marriage had been postponed? Was a new misfortune threatening him in this direction?

He was greatly disturbed; all the more because he had his own opinion about the marriage. He did not wish it to take place under the present condition of things. Still, his anxiety caused him to waver in this determination.

"Very well," he said finally, "I will speak to Colomban."

And without another word he continued to pace the room. Soon his wife's eyes closed. She looked, as she lay there asleep, as if she were already dead.

Before her husband retired, he lifted the curtain and looked out. On the other side of the way the workmen were busy under the electric lights.

Early the next morning Baudu met Colomban in the shop. He had decided just what he would say.

"My boy," he began, "you know I have sold my property at Rambouillet, and I have something to say to you."

The young man, who did not seem to be gratified by the prospect of this conversation, waited in an awkward sort of way. His little eyes winked, and his mouth was open, which signs indicated great perturbation of spirit.

"Yes, and listen to me attentively," continued the draper. "When my father-in-law, old Hauchecorne, relinquished this business to me, the House was a prosperous one,—as much so as when he had received it from old Finet, his father-in-law. You know my ideas about it. I should consider myself doing a very shabby thing if I should hand down to my children this family inheritance in an impoverished condition, and this is why I have continually postponed your marriage with Geneviève. Yes, I have been very obstinate. I wanted to lay my books before you and say:

"Look here! The year I took the management of this House, we sold so many cloths. And this year when I hand it over to you, we have sold ten thousand or thirty thousand francs worth more."

"This was the oath I took to myself, and it seems only natural that I should wish to prove to you that the House has lost nothing while under my management. Otherwise it would seem to me that I had robbed you—"

His voice was choked with emotion. He took out his handkerchief, blew his nose, and then added:

"You say nothing?"

But Colomban had nothing to say. He shook his head and waited, more and more troubled, for he thought he understood what his employer meant. How could he marry Geneviève, when his heart and thoughts were pervaded by another.

"This money," continued Baudu, "may save us. The situation is certainly becoming worse each day,

but one supreme effort may be made. I wanted to warn you that this is our last struggle. If we are beaten we may as well be buried. Only, my poor boy, your marriage must be still further postponed, for I do not wish to drag you into all this trouble. It would be a mean act."

Colomban was inexpressibly relieved, and sank on a pile of woolens. His limbs would not sustain him. He was afraid that his joy would be detected; he dropped his eyes and played with his fingers.

"You say nothing?" repeated Baudu.

No, he said nothing, for he had nothing to say.

Then the draper continued slowly:

"I was sure you would be distressed, but cheer up. Try and realize my position. Can I fasten such a paving-stone to your neck, my boy? Instead of leaving you a good business, I might even entail upon you a failure. Only a rascal could do that. I desire your happiness, but I cannot run the risk of doing anything for which you would have a right to reproach me."

He went on talking in this strain, becoming swamped in a mass of contradictory phrases, like a man who wished to be compelled to do something of which he did not wholly approve. As he had promised his daughter and his business, strict honesty demanded that both should be surrendered in good condition.

But he was weary; his burden had become almost intolerable, and there was a tone of entreaty in his trembling voice. The words became more than ever unintelligible, and he waited anxiously for an outburst of affection from Colomban, but none came.

"I know," continued Baudu in a low voice, "that the old are without fire,—with the young, flames are readily kindled,—that's only nature. But I cannot consent. If I yielded to you I should only reproach myself later."

He held his breath to listen for the reply. None came, and as the young man held his head lower still, Baudu said for the third time, at the end of a long and painful silence:

"You say nothing?"

Then, without looking up, Colomban replied:

"There's nothing to be said. You are the master, and you are wiser than any of us. We will try and do as you wish. We will wait patiently."

Baudu still hoped that the young man would snatch his hand, urge him to reconsider his resolve, and say:

"Father, you must rest; we will struggle now,—it is our turn, give us the shop as it stands, and let us try to save it!"

Then he looked at Colomban, and was seized with shame, and accused himself of wishing to dupe his children. The exaggerated honesty of an honorable merchant was aroused within him. This prudent young man was right. There is no sentiment in commerce—only figures.

"Embrace me, my boy," he said in conclusion. "It is settled, we must not think of the marriage for another year."

That evening when alone in their chamber, Madame Baudu questioned her husband on the result of the conversation. He immediately went off on a long

eulogy of Colomban. An excellent fellow,—practical and of good principles; incapable, moreover, of talking and laughing with the customers like those jackanapes at the *Bonheur*. No, he was a good fellow,—

"But when will they be married?" persisted Madame Baudu.

"Later on," he replied. "I wish to keep my promises." She did not move, she did not expostulate; but presently she said after a long silence:

"Our child will die!"

Baudu was furious. It was he who would die if he was perpetually tormented in this way. Was it his fault? He loved his daughter tenderly, and would shed his blood for her, but he could not keep the shop going. Geneviève ought to have more sense, and a little patience. Colomban was safe, no one would steal him!

"I don't understand it!" he said, "it is incredible in a girl who has been so well brought up!"

Madame Baudu said no more. She unquestionably divined the jealousy that tortured Geneviève, but she did not consider it advisable to confide in her husband. A certain womanly timidity prevented her from approaching a subject so delicate.

When he saw that she would say no more, he turned his anger against the people opposite, and threatened them with his fist.

Denise was about to return to the *Bonheur des Dames*. She saw that the Robineaus, although compelled to reduce all their expenses, were most unwilling to dismiss her. Gaujean gave them long credits, a

even offered to lend them money, but they were afraid, and determined to keep their expenses down instead of borrowing. For the last fortnight Denise had been uncomfortable, because she could see that they were so, and she had made up her mind to tell them that she had secured a place elsewhere.

It was a great relief. Madame Robineau embraced her with tears in her eyes, and said she parted with her with regret.

But when the girl, in reply to a question, said she should return to Mouret's establishment, Robineau turned very pale.

"You are right!" he at last exclaimed with some violence.

It was less easy to tell the same news to old Bonnat. Nevertheless Denise could not postpone her confession, and she trembled at the thought of his displeasure, for she was profoundly grateful for all his kindness. Bonnat had quieted down considerably; carts encumbered the street in front of his door, pickaxes were at work on his walls, and the canes and parasols in his shop were jarred until they danced.

The architect, in order to connect the Departments in the shop with those now being created in the old Hôtel Duvillard, had decided to make a passage under the little house that separated them. This house now belonged to Mouret, and the lease stated that the expense of all repairs should be borne by the tenant. Workmen therefore appeared one morning, and Bonnat was threatened with a fit of apoplexy. Was it not enough that the life should be squeezed out of him on

the left and the right, before and behind, but that they must undermine the very earth beneath his feet! He drove away the workmen and said he would appeal to the law. He was obliged to make all necessary repairs, he said, but these were not repairs.

The *quartier* thought he would gain his suit, which would of course be long and expensive.

The day that Denise had resolved to tell him of her new arrangements, he had been to his lawyer's.

"Will you believe it!" he cried, as soon as he saw her, "they say that the house is not sold, and that the foundations are in need of repair. I should think they might be, after all they have been doing!"

Then when the young girl told him she was going, that she was to return to the *Bonheur* with a salary of one thousand francs, he was so startled, so overwhelmed that he could only lift his hands to heaven as he sank into his chair.

"You! You!" he stammered. "Then I am to be left alone!"

Presently he said:

"And the child?"

"He will go back to Madame Gras," answered Denise, "she loves him."

He did not speak again. She would have much preferred to see him violent and abusive, but the sight of this silent, broken-hearted old man brought tears to her eyes.

But he gathered himself together after a time, and began to talk loudly.

"A thousand francs! Of course you can't refuse a

thousand francs. Go, leave me alone—alone, do you hear? There is at least one who will not lick their boots! And tell them that I will win my suit, even if I pawn my last shirt!"

Denise did not leave Robineau until the end of the month; she had seen Mouret, and all arrangements were made. One evening on returning from Robineau's she saw Deloche, who was standing under a *portecochère* waiting for her. He had just heard the good news of her return to the *Bonheur*, the whole shop was talking of it, he said, and he began to tell her some of the gossip.

"The women in the cloak room are none too well pleased," he said, and then interrupting himself:

"By the way, you remember Clara, it seems that the manager—you understand?"

He was red, and she, very pale, exclaimed:

"Monsieur Mouret!"

"A queer taste, is it not? A woman that looks like a horse. That pale little girl at the *lingerie* counter who was his friend last year was very different. However, that is his own affair."

Denise, when she entered her room, felt faint and ill. It was because she had mounted the stairs too fast. Leaning from the window with closed eyes she had a sudden vision of Valognes, of the deserted streets, the stones half overgrown with grass she had seen from the window of her room for so many years, and she felt a passionate longing to take refuge in the forgetfulness and peace of the province; Paris irritated her, she hated the *Bonheur des Dames*, and could not

imagine why she had consented to go back. Certainly she would be made to suffer there again; in fact she was suffering already, since she had seen Deloche. And finally a passionate fit of weeping drove her from the window. She wept a long time, and afterward felt a little courage to live.

The next day after breakfast, Robineau having sent her out to attend to some business, she stopped at her uncle's as she was passing the door. Colomban was alone in the shop. The Baudus were at breakfast, for she heard the rattle of dishes and the noise of knives and forks.

"You can go in," said the young man.

But she laid her finger on her lip and drew him into a corner.

"It is to you that I wish to speak," she said. "Have you no heart? Do you not see that Geneviève loves you,—that she is dying?"

She was shivering; all the excitement of the previous evening had again assailed her. He, quite terrified by this sudden attack, could not find a word with which to reply.

"Do you hear?" she said. "Geneviève knows that you love another. She told me so with bitter tears. Ah! poor child, she is so ill and so thin. Say, do you intend her to die like this?"

"But she is not ill," he stammered. "I don't see what I can do. Besides, it is her father who has postponed the marriage."

Denise sharply told him that what he said was false. One word from himself was all that was necessary.

Her instinct had advised her that her uncle would yield only too gladly.

Colomban's surprise at the idea of Geneviève's illness was not feigned—he really had never suspected it, and it was to him a most unpleasant revelation; but he did not see all the same, he said, why he should be reproached in this way.

"And for such a woman!" resumed Denise, not taking the trouble to listen to what he said. "Have you any idea on what and whom you are lavishing your heart? I have never cared to say much about her until now, and I have continually avoided answering your questions. But now I tell you that she is thoroughly wicked, and that she is laughing at you, and that she will never be more to you than she is to-day."

He listened with a white face, and at each of these sentences which she uttered through her close-shut teeth, his lips trembled nervously.

She, cruel and merciless, yielded to the passion that moved her, without any clear perception of what she was doing.

"She is the friend of Monsieur Mouret!" she cried, in conclusion. "Do you know that?"

Her voice was choked; she was now paler than he. The two stood looking at each other.

Then he stammered huskily:

"I love her!"

Denise was covered with shame. Why had she spoken thus to this young man, and why had she been so passionate? She was silenced by these simple words that echoed through her heart like the sound of

a joyous bell. He was right. He could not marry another.

As she turned away, she saw Geneviève standing in the door of the dining-room.

"Hush!" she said quickly, to Colomban, but it was too late. Geneviève had heard; she was as white as marble.

A customer appeared at that moment, Madame Bourdelais, one of the last adherents to the old shop. She was always sure of finding good materials here.

Madame Boves had left them long since, and following the fashion, frequented the *Bonheur*. Madame Marly was also fascinated by the seductions opposite.

Geneviève was now forced to advance, and say in her faint voice:

"What can I show you, Madame?"

Madame Bourdelais wanted some flannel. Colomban took down one piece, and Geneviève showed it, their cold hands touching each other.

Baudu came out smiling from the dining-room, preceded by his wife, who took her usual seat at the desk. But Baudu did not interfere with the sale of the flannel. He nodded to Denise kindly.

"This is not nice enough," said the lady; "show me something better."

Colomban took down another piece. Madame Bourdelais examined the quality.

"How much?" she asked.

"Six francs, Madame," Geneviève answered.

"Six francs! But they have the same across the street for five."

Baudu frowned. He could not refrain from interfering. He said politely that Madame must be mistaken; "this article ought to sell for six francs fifty. It was impossible to sell it for five francs."

"No," she answered, with the obstinacy of a woman who does not mean to be cheated, "it is the same thing, unless the other is a trifle thicker."

The discussion threatened to become lively. Baudu's face flushed, but he tried to smile. His bitterness against the *Bonheur* caused the bile to rise in his throat.

"Really," said Madame Bourdelais, "you ought to treat me better, unless you wish me to go with all the others, to the shop opposite."

He lost his head, and cried hotly:

"Go, if you choose."

She instantly rose, and deeply wounded, said quietly:

"That is what I propose to do, sir."

There was a profound silence in the shop. The violence of the master had startled every one. He himself trembled at what he had said. The words had come from his lips almost without any intention of speaking, and were the result of long-restrained anger. And now the Baudus stood silent and stupefied, watching Madame Bourdelais as she crossed the street. It was not until she vanished inside the door of the *Bonheur* that they breathed again.

"Another has left us," murmured the draper. Then turning toward Denise, of whose new plans he had only just heard, he said: "And they have taken you back? Go, I wish to have nothing more to do with you. They have money and can do more for you than I!"

Denise, still hoping that Geneviève had not heard Colomban's words, was at this moment whispering in her ear :

"He loves you. Try and be more cheerful."

But the young girl answered :

"Why are you so false? Look at him, he is even now gazing up at the window. They have stolen him as well as every one, and every thing else from us."

And she moved away and took her seat by the side of her mother, who had probably divined the new sorrow endured by her daughter, for her sad eyes wandered from her to Colomban and then to the *Bonheur*.

It was true. They had lost everything. The father his fortune, the mother her child, who was dying before her eyes, and the daughter, the husband for whom she had been waiting ten years.

Denise, standing in the presence of this unfortunate family, felt as if she were doing wrong in putting her hand to the machine that was grinding them to powder.

"Pshaw!" resumed Baudu, trying to speak gaily. "We shall not die of this. We lose one client, but we shall have ten in her place! Listen to me, Denise, I have seventy thousand francs; and I mean to make your dear Mouret very miserable with them. Cheer up friends, don't look as if you had just come from a funeral."

But he could not enliven them, and he himself sank into depression. They all gazed on the monster in front of them. The work was nearly completed, the scaffolding was being removed from the front of the

edifice, and eight huge vans were being filled for the noon delivery; the highly varnished panels, picked out with yellow and red, sent blinding reflections into the Baudus' shop. The coachmen in their black clothes, trim and erect, held their horses well in, while the animals shook their heads impatiently. Each time one of these wagons drove away full, the pavement trembled and shook the little shops in the neighborhood.

The hearts of the Baudus were nearly broken at the sight of this triumphal procession. The father asked himself where all this merchandise could be going, while the mother, troubled by her daughter's illness, gazed through her tears at the inevitable ruin approaching.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON Monday, March 14th, the *Bonheur des Dames* opened its new buildings with an exposition of summer novelties, which lasted three days. Without, a sharp north wind was blowing, and the people in the street, surprised at this return of winter, hurried on, buttoned close in their overcoats.

There were eager faces at the glass doors and at the windows of the shops in the neighborhood. They were busy counting the carriages before the new door on the Rue Neuve Saint-Augustin. This door, as high and wide as that of a church, had above it a group, Industry and Commerce hand-in-hand, surrounded by a host of attributes. On either side stretched the new façades, as yet clean and white.

As early as six o'clock, Mouret was down stairs to give his last orders. A long gallery ran from end to end of the new building; this was crossed by two narrower galleries. The court-yards had been enclosed with glass, while iron bridges were thrown occasionally across. The architect, who was young and intelligent, had used stone very sparingly, but had employed iron in all its forms; iron columns supported the arches and the roof. Air and space seemed to have been his first calculation. It was the Cathedral of modern commerce, solid yet light.

Under the central gallery were the counters for cravats, gloves, hose, etc. Above, were *lingerie*, shawls, laces and many other things, and on the next floor carpets and furniture. At this time there were thirty-nine Departments and eighteen hundred employés, of whom two hundred were women.

Mouret had great regard for women. He wished them to reign in his mansion. He had built them a Temple where he could hold them at his mercy. His principal idea was to tempt them with novelties. He had built two elevators to save delicate women the trouble and fatigue of mounting the stairs. He had opened a lunch room, where syrups and biscuits were given gratuitously to customers, and there was also a picture gallery. But his cleverest idea perhaps, was that of gaining mothers through their children; he speculated on every tender sentiment, and provided Departments especially for boys and girls, and children were presented with colored balloons. This was a master stroke, these balloons which were given to every purchaser. They were red, and had the name of the House on one side, and floated in the air held by a string, through half the streets in Paris that day.

Publicity was one of Mouret's secrets of power. He expended nine hundred thousand francs every year in handbills, placards and advertisements. He had sent out two hundred thousand catalogues for his summer opening, of which fifty thousand were in foreign tongues. He had illustrated these catalogues with engravings and even with samples. The *Bonheur des Dames* stared the public in the face at every turn. Its

placards were on the corners, and on the very drop-curtain at the theatre.

His belief was, that women could not resist publicity, and invariably followed after noise. He had moreover, discovered that bargains were dear to the hearts of women, that they bought things they did not need, merely because they were cheap; and upon this observation he based his system of diminution of prices, and perpetually reduced the prices of the articles remaining unsold, preferring to sell them at a loss, remaining faithful to his principle of renewing his merchandise as often as possible.

Then he had learned another secret. He allowed his customers to return, and exchange what they bought. "Take it, Madame; you can return it, if on examination at home it ceases to please you."

And the woman who had resisted all other temptations found in these words a last excuse, and thought it possible she could retrace her steps when convinced that she had been foolish. She took the articles and went away with a heart at ease.

But where Mouret revealed his masterly ability more clearly than elsewhere, was in the interior arrangement of his establishment. He issued a fiat that not a corner in the *Bonheur des Dames* should be deserted; he insisted on noise, a crowd and excitement, for these draw. In the first place, he wished the whole street to suppose that his shop was overcrowded. He therefore placed near the door, boxes and baskets containing articles greatly under their value, to induce people to linger there, leading those outside to believe

the shop was crowded, at a time when few people were there. He placed on the third floor carpets and furniture for the customers who came, for there were few. Had these articles been sold on the *rez de chaussée* they would have drawn a crowd. He would really have liked to carry a street directly through the shop.

Mouret was very busy this Monday morning, for on Saturday night he had been disturbed by the sudden conviction, while looking at the completed arrangements for the next week, that he had made a great mistake in his classification of the Departments, and yet it was clearly managed; materials on one side, made up articles on the other, an arrangement which the most ordinary intellect would grasp. He had studied out this plan in other days, in Madame Hédouin's narrow quarters, and when able, had carried it into execution. Now he suddenly called out:

"All this is to be changed!"

They had but forty-eight hours, and a large portion of the goods were to be moved. Everybody was excited. Two nights and a day were spent in confusion. Even on Monday morning, an hour before the opening, things were not in their place, and the clerks were in despair and consternation.

"We must hurry!" cried Mouret, with the tranquil assurance of genius. "These costumes must be carried up stairs. One more effort, boys, and we shall be through!"

Bourdoucle had been at work since dawn, but he understood Mouret no better than did the others, and

he watched his friend uneasily. He did not dare ask a question at such a moment; he was by no means sure how it would be received.

Finally he ventured to say :

"Is it absolutely necessary to upset everything at this time?"

Mouret shrugged his shoulders in silence, but when the other repeated his questions, he exploded :

"You want all your customers in one corner, do you? Can't you see what I wish to do? A woman comes in, she goes straight to the counter where she buys a dress, on to the next for a mantle, and then goes away without having seen anything, or being tempted to make other purchases."

"But," said Bourdouce, "now that you have scattered everything to the four winds of heaven, the clerks will walk their legs off taking the customers to and fro."

Mouret made a gesture of superb contempt.

"They are young, and it will make them grow," he said. "Besides, it keeps up the idea of a crowd."

He laughed, and then dropping his voice :

"See here, Bourdouce," he said, "in the first place, this incessant going and coming of our customers into every corner of the shop makes them appear double the number. In the next place, after a dress is bought and a lining is wanted, the customers are impressed by the size of the shop as they are carried through Department after Department, and finally in these various Departments they yield to temptation, and buy things they would otherwise never have seen."

Bourdoucle laughed at this, and Mouret, delighted at having won him over, called out to the men at work:

"Well done, my friends! Now a few strokes of the broom and we are all right."

As Mouret turned he saw Denise, who, coming down the stairs, stopped short at the sight of all this confusion.

"What is going on?" she murmured.

Her surprise seemed to amuse Mouret. Denise had returned to the *Bonheur* early in February, and was pleasantly surprised to find every one polite, almost respectful. Madame Aurélie was especially courteous, Clara and Marguérite were resigned, and even Jouve bowed obsequiously, but seemed somewhat embarrassed. It had been quite enough for Mouret to say one word to change the manners of all these people. And amid the general amiability, the girl was wounded only by the singular sadness of Deloche, and by Pauline's mysterious smiles.

In the meantime Mouret was watching her.

"For whom are you looking?" he asked, suddenly.

Denise had not seen him. She colored slightly. Since her return to the *Bonheur* she had received from him many marks of kindness, which had touched her deeply. Pauline, without her knowing why, had carefully informed her of Mouret's affair with Clara, in all its details—things she knew, and things she suspected—and then added, that he had still another friend, a Madame Desforges, who was well known to the shop.

These stories disturbed Denise, and brought back all her old feelings of discomfort.

"What is all this confusion?" asked the girl.

Mouret did not reply to this question, but as he passed Denise he said to her, in rather a low voice:

"Come to my office this evening. I wish to speak to you."

She nodded slightly, without a word. But Bourdoucle had heard Mouret, and looked at him with a smile; he even ventured to say, when they were alone:

"Look out! It will end in something serious."

Mouret defended himself, hiding his emotion under an air of great carelessness.

"No more jokes, my friend, on this point. The woman is not yet born who can make me serious!"

And as the shop was now thrown open, he moved away to inspect each Department once more. Bourdoucle shook his head. This Denise, simple and gentle as she was, began to make him very uneasy. Once he had conquered her by taking the law into his own hand, and dismissing her; but she had reappeared, and with quadrupled strength he felt. He now regarded her as a formidable rival, who should be treated with profound consideration—he was silently biding his time.

Mouret met him below.

"How is this?" he said, angrily. "I told them to arrange the blue umbrellas as a border. Let all this be changed at once."

He would listen to no excuses. A whole army of shop boys came to change the umbrellas. When customers began to come in, he ordered that room to be closed, and declared that it should remain so until the

blue umbrellas were removed from the centre. Hutten and Mignol came to see what was going on; they pretended not to understand, being of an entirely different school. Finally the doors were thrown open, and the crush became so great, that policemen were called upon to disperse the crowd before the door.

Mouret had counted rightly. The little *bourgeoises* and the *grisettes* were transfixed by the bargains offered in the street. There were calicos at five sous, and cambrics at seven, remnants of lace in the baskets at ten centimes, ribbons at five sous, garters at three, gloves and skirts, cotton hose and chemises. All disappeared as if devoured by the hungry crowd. In spite of the sharp air, the clerks who were selling out of doors, did not suffer. One stout woman went into hysterics, and two young girls were nearly suffocated.

The crush continued to increase. About one o'clock the street was absolutely impassable.

Madame de Boves, and her daughter Blanche, were trying to enter the shop, and suddenly beheld Madame Marly, who had her daughter also with her.

"Was there ever anything so frightful?" called one lady to the other. "I did not mean to come; in fact I was ill in bed when I decided to go out for a little air."

"It was much the same with me," said the other. "I promised my husband to go to see his sister at Montmartre. As I came by here I remembered that I needed a bit of braid and thought I might as well get it here as any where else. I don't mean to spend any money, though, for I really require nothing just now."

As these ladies talked, however, they watched for an opportunity to enter the door.

"No, I will not go in," murmured Madame de Boves. "We must go away, Blanche, unless we desire to be crushed."

But at the same time she allowed herself to be swept on with the crowd.

"Take hold of my dress, Valentine," said the mother, "I never saw anything like it."

These ladies were now in the midst of the current, and could not retreat. As rivers draw unto themselves all the wandering streams of the valley, the flood of customers sucked in the passing population. It was a pell-mell of ladies in silk, women in calico gowns, girls in caps, all animated by the same passion. A few men were in the crowd, but they were evidently ill at ease. A stout nurse lifted her charge high in the air. One woman was angry, and indulged in very bad language because her dress was torn.

Madame Marly stood on tiptoe and slightly contracted her eyes to see into the shop. She drew a long breath of relief.

"At last!" she said.

These ladies now succeeded in releasing themselves. They were greatly surprised to find the central hall almost empty. But it seemed to them that they had stepped from winter into summer, or rather spring. While an icy wind whistled without, the *Bonheur* was gay with summer costumes and spring tints.

"Look!" said Madame de Boves, gazing upward.

It was the umbrellas that had attracted her atte

tion. They were spread open like shields and bucklers, and covered the entire walls. They hung in gay festoons about the slender columns, and the stairs, and from the bridges, looking like gay Venetian lanterns lighted for some colossal *fête*. In the corners were stars made of umbrellas, at thirty-nine sous, in pale tints, blue, cream white, violet, and rose, while over all were huge Japanese parasols, where golden dashes mingled with a crimson background.

Madame Marly could find no words with which to express her admiration except—

"It is Fairyland!"

These she repeated over and over again. Then turning to the right, she said:

"This way for my braid; I shall buy that, and then I must vanish."

"I will go with you," said Madame de Boves. "Blanche, we will just go through the shop, that is all!"

But the ladies wandered about aimlessly. They turned to the left, but so many changes had been made that they did not know where to go. Under the galleries the heat was intense, and they were not disposed to linger there. They found themselves after awhile back at the door, where there was a crowd coming in and another going out,—an interminable procession of women and children, over whom floated a cloud of red balloons. Forty thousand of these balloons were ready, and a certain number of shop-boys had the especial charge of their distribution. It looked as if the whole air were filled with enormous

soap-bubbles, reflecting the blaze of the Japanese umbrellas. The shop was illuminated with them.

"It is a new world," said Madame de Boves. "I should never know where I was."

These ladies could not remain in the doorway however, hustled by the throng. Inspector Jouve fortunately discovered them, and came to their assistance. He stood in the vestibule, and seemed to have an instinctive consciousness of a thief among the women.

Madame de Boves thanked him for summoning a shop-boy to lead the way, and Madame Marly turning, found that Valentine was no longer at her side. She was greatly relieved however, when she beheld her standing at a table where cravats were displayed.

"Oh! mamma," murmured the girl, "look at these cravats, nineteen sous, and they have a bird embroidered in the corner." The clerk who had them in charge now began to extol their quality, swore they were all silk, and thrown on the market in consequence of the failure of the manufacturer—no such bargain could ever be found again.

"Nineteen sous! is it possible?" cried Madame Marly. "I must have two, it can't ruin me." Madame de Boves was however, quite disdainful. She detested being asked to buy, and a clerk who extolled his wares disgusted her. Madame Marly did not understand this, she was of that class of women who like to lose their time in useless discussions.

"Come," she said, "I must have my braid and then I am certainly going."

As she made her way through the display of gloves

and foulards, she was again struck by the beauty of what she saw. The counters were like borders of flowers. From open boxes drooped foulard, scarlet as geraniums, milky white like petunias, golden yellow like chysanthemums, celestial blue like larkspurs, while above, wreathed on columns, were ribbons and fichus, their soft tints reflected in the mirrors. On the glove counter there was a Swiss cottage built entirely of gloves, a *chef d'œuvre* of Mignol.

"What can I show you, Madame?" asked Mignol, when he saw Madame Marly glued to the ground before the châlet. "There are *gants de Suède*, first quality, one franc, seventy-five centimes."

As she shook her head, he continued:

"*Gants de Tyrol* at one franc, seventy-five; *gants de Turin*, for children, and gloves embroidered in all colors."

"No, thanks, I do not require any just now," answered Madame Marly.

But he felt that her voice softened, and at once laid before her the embroidered gloves. She bought a pair, and when Madame de Boves looked at her with a smile, she colored.

"I am a simpleton, am I not? If I don't get my braid and depart, I am a lost woman!" Unfortunately the crowd was so great at the counter where braids were sold, that she could not be waited upon. They were compelled to stand there for ten minutes, and were losing their tempers, when Madame Bourdelais and her three children appeared. The mother, with her tranquil air, said she wished to show the *Bonheur*

to her little people. Madeleine was ten, Edouard eight, Lucien four, and they all were in excellent spirits at this fulfilment of an old promise.

"I must buy one of those red umbrellas," said Madame Marly suddenly, for she was impatient at being detained here with nothing to do.

She selected one at fourteen francs fifty. Madame Bourdelais, after looking at this purchase half reprovingly, said quietly :

"You make a mistake in being so prompt ; in a fortnight you would have got it for twelve francs. They won't catch me in that way !"

And she went on to explain how she managed. She never purchased anything until the price was reduced, which it was sure to be before long. She declared moreover, with a touch of malice, that she never allowed these people to make a sou out of her. She said in conclusion, that she had promised her little ones to take them up stairs.

"Come with us," she said, "you have plenty of time."

The braid was forgotten, and Madame Marly yielded, but Madame de Boves refused, preferring to see more of the lower floor. Madame Bourdelais was looking for a stair-case when she perceived one of the elevators ; she pushed the children in, and Madame Marly and Valentine with herself, filled the little cage. The examination of the mirrors and the velvet covered seats was so interesting that they did not notice the gentle motion of the machine.

Another excitement awaited them. As they passed

the buffet, Madame Bourdelais stopped to gorge the children with syrup. It was a square room with a large counter; at the two ends silvery fountains were dripping, and back of these were long rows of bottles. Three waiters were incessantly washing glasses. The crowd was immense; it seemed as if this gratuitous refreshment developed a latent gluttony in all these people.

"Where are they?" cried Madame Bourdelais, finally disengaging herself from the throng, and stooping to wipe the mouths of the children with her handkerchief.

But she saw Madame Marly and Valentine at the end of a long gallery; they were both absorbed in the examination of skirts. They were evidently carried away by the passion of buying, and were making no further resistance. Madame Bourdelais on reaching the reading-room placed Madeleine, Edouard and Lucien before the great table, then going to the book-case brought them a large volume of photographs to examine at their leisure.

The ceiling of this room was heavily gilded, at the ends monumental chimney-pieces faced each other. Second-rate pictures in very rich frames covered the walls; and between the columns, before each of the arches that overlooked the shop below, there were tall shrubs in Majolica vases. The people seated around the tables covered with newspapers, stationery and inkstands, were very quiet. A number of women had taken off their gloves and were writing letters on paper bearing the mark of the House. Several men com-

fortably seated in arm-chairs were reading the newspapers. But most of the individuals in the room were doing nothing; husbands were waiting for their wives, who were making their purchases in the various Departments, young and pretty women were waiting for the arrival of a lover with whom they had made an appointment, and old ladies were safely deposited here to be called for later.

These people lazily looked through these arches down on the lower floor, from which ascended a steady buzz of voices.

"What! you here!" cried Madame Bourdelais. "I did not recognize you."

Near the children sat a lady whose face had been hidden by the open pages of a magazine. It was Madame Guibal, who seemed annoyed at the meeting, but she recovered her serenity and told how being utterly tired out she had come up to rest a little, and to escape the crowd. When Madame Bourdelais asked if she had come to make any purchases, she replied in her languid little way, half closing her eyes to conceal the selfish keenness of her expression:

"Oh! no. On the contrary I came to exchange things I bought two days since. A skirt and some portières, but the crowd was so great that I could not get near the counter." She talked on, saying how very convenient this establishment was in many ways, and that their willingness to allow goods to be exchanged was particularly agreeable to her, for she was, she confessed, only too apt to take a dislike to things when she once got them home. The fact was, she returned four

out of every five purchases she made, and had become well known by her oddities and the perpetual discontent that induced her to bring articles back, one by one, after keeping them several days.

While Madame Guibal talked she watched the doors closely, and seemed decidedly relieved when Madame Bourdelais returned to her children, and began to explain the photographs. Almost at the same moment Monsieur de Boves and Paul de Vallegnose entered. The Comte affected to be showing the young man the wonders of this great establishment, but he gave Madame Guibal one expressive glance that told volumes. She immediately, as if she had not seen him, became absorbed in her reading.

"Hollo! Paul!" said a voice behind these gentlemen.

It was Mouret, who seemed that day to be everywhere at once. They shook hands with him and he said:

"Has Madame de Boves done us the honor to come here to-day?"

"Oh! no," answered the Comte, "she is not quite well. Nothing dangerous however."

Suddenly he pretended to see Madame de Guibal. He went up to her, hat in hand, while the other two contented themselves with a profound salutation from a distance.

She pretended to be greatly surprised. Paul smiled. He understood perfectly what was going on, and he told Mouret a little later how the Comte had met him on the street and fairly dragged him into the *Bonheur*.

For a year Madame Guibal had been spending the Comte's money freely. She never wrote to him, but met him in public places—in churches, museums and shops.

"I am convinced," continued the young man, "that when his wife supposed him to be away on his last tour of inspection, and when he wrote letters that were postmarked Blois, Libourne, Tarbes, he was quietly ensconced in a little Hôtel at Batignolles. Just watch him! Was there ever anything so superb as his manners? Old France, my friend, old France!"

"And your marriage will take place, when?" asked Mouret.

Paul, without taking his eyes from the Comte replied that they were waiting for the death of the aunt. Then with a triumphant air, he said:

"Did you see that, he gave her a slip of paper, an address of course, and she took it with her honest, artless air. What a woman! Upon my word, strange things go on under your roof."

"Ah!" answered Mouret, "it is not my roof, it is theirs."

Then he continued, in a jesting tone, Love, like swallows, brought happiness to a house. He knew all these women, knew very well why many of them wandered about his establishment, but if they did not buy anything, they at least imparted an air of life to the place.

While he talked, he led his old friend to the door of the *salon* opposite the central gallery. Behind them was the quiet reading room, whence came the scratching of nervous pens and the rustle of newspapers.

An old gentleman was asleep over the *Moniteur*, Monsieur de Boves looked at the pictures with the evident intention of losing his future son-in-law in the crowd. Madame Bourdelais was as calmly gay and triumphant surrounded by her children, as if in a conquered territory.

"You see how entirely at home they are!" said Mouret, waving his hand toward the various Departments all crowded with women.

Madame Desforges had at that moment entered the *Bonheur*. When she reached the grand gallery she stopped and looked up. It was like an enormous railway station, surrounded by galleries and connected by light bridges. The iron stair-cases were everywhere and every thing was so light, that it suggested lace rather than anything more solid. The young architect had had the courage and the sense not to disguise it with paint, and force it to imitate stone or wood. On the lower floor the decoration was very simple, in order not to injure the effect of the merchandise. But as the columns grew in height, they burst into flower, so to speak, while above, the ceiling was of the most brilliant tints, with a profusion of gold, which was also the predominant tints in the upper windows; a band of gay tiles enlivened the frieze, the hand-rail of the stairs was red velvet, and was ornamented with a band of polished steel as bright as armor.

Although all these details had been described to her, Madame Desforges had stopped short, amazed at the glow and beauty of all she saw. The crowd surging to and fro, was still strangely mixed, there were

ladies in silks and velvet, ladies in deep mourning with heavy veils, nurses holding their infants high up out of danger, servants and grisettes in their fluted caps, while enormous mirrors multiplied all these forms and faces. Gilded chandeliers hung from the vaulted ceilings, Oriental stuffs and rich silks streamed forth like banners, creamy laces and transparent muslins fluttered here and there.

"Shall I show you some garters, Madame?" asked a salesman of Madame Desforges, when he saw that she was absolutely motionless. "They are wonderfully cheap, only twenty-nine sous."

The lady did not condescend to reply, but slowly turned to the left. She passed the desk of Albert L'Homme. He recognized her with an amiable smile, but she found some difficulty in entering the silk room. The red balloons still floated in the air, more numerous than ever, piling up like crimson clouds; she was obliged to stoop sometimes to avoid them, when the string that held them was wound around the plump hands of very little children.

"Upon my word, Madame, you are very courageous," cried Bouthemont, as soon as he perceived Madame Desforges.

The "*Chef de Comptoir*," introduced by Mouret himself, often went to her house to take tea. She thought him extremely common, but very amiable and droll. He astonished but amused her. The previous evening he had told her in very distinct terms of Mouret's affair with Clara, not out of malice, but simply as a capital joke, while she, devoured by jealousy, but

hiding her wounds under the air of disdainful indifference, after brooding over his story, had now come to discover the girl whom he had designated simply as a young lady in the cloak room, and had refused to give her name.

"Can I show you anything to-day?" he asked.

"Of course; have you foulards for matinées?" She was determined to obtain from him the name of the girl in the cloak room, and equally determined to see her.

He at once summoned Favier, and lingered himself until Favier could come, the latter being then engaged with "the pretty lady,"—the beautiful blonde, whom every one in the shop knew by sight, but of whose name and position they were still ignorant. This time "the pretty lady" was in deep mourning. Who could she have lost,—a husband or a father? Not her father they thought, or she would have looked sadder. She must be respectable if she had lost a husband. She might, to be sure, be in mourning for her mother, and for some minutes the clerks at the silk counter exchanged suppositions.

"Make haste!" said Hutten to Favier, who had taken the lady to the cashier's desk. "When this person is here you never get through. She must think you very ridiculous!"

"Not half so ridiculous as I think her!" answered the salesman, greatly vexed.

But Hutten threatened to report him if he spoke of the customers with such disrespect. Hutten had become extremely severe ever since he had taken Robi-

neau's place, and in fact became so insupportable in spite of the many promises he had made, that the clerks were now quietly forming a conspiracy to put Favier in his place.

"You need say no more," Hutten added, severely. "Monsieur Bouthemont wants you to show some foulards, light grounds."

The centre of the silk room was occupied by an exhibition of summer silks of the most delicate tints, reminding one of a rainbow or the clouds at sunset. There were foulards, surahs, pongees and tussorees, as well as stripes and checks; cream white grounds woven with bouquets of roses, brought up images of ladies in *falbalas*, walking under green trees on a breezy morning in May.

"I will take that one, the Louis XIV. with the bunches of roses," said Madame Desforçes, finally.

And while Favier measured off the quantity she desired, she made a last attempt on Bouthemont, who still stood near her.

"I am going up stairs," she said; "I want something in the way of a travelling wrap. Is the young lady of your story a blonde?"

Bouthemont, who had been made rather uneasy by her persistence, merely smiled in reply. But at this moment Denise passed. She was with Madame Bontarel, the lady from the provinces, who came twice each year to spend the money she had accumulated in the country. When Denise had left her at the merino counter, she turned back, and as Favier took up the foulard purchased by Madame Desforçes, Hutten thin

ing to vex him, said: "No, you need not go; this young lady will kindly show Madame the way."

Denise, greatly disturbed, took the package and the bill. She never met Hutten face to face without feeling a flush of shame mount to her cheek, as if she had been guilty of some great error. And yet she had sinned only in her dreams. Had she really loved him? She did not know. She would not examine her own heart.

"Tell me," asked Madame Desforges in a low voice of Bouthemont, "is not that the awkward creature? I remember seeing her before. He has taken her back into the establishment then? Is not she the heroine of your story?"

"Perhaps," answered Bouthemont, still smiling, and quite decided not to tell the truth. Then, preceded by Denise, Madame Desforges slowly mounted the stairs. It was necessary to stand still in order not to be swept away by the crowd that was coming down. On each stair was a *mannequin*, firmly planted, clothed in an entire costume, with paletots, or dressing-gowns. Madame Desforges finally reached the floor above, but was again compelled to stand still. She looked down upon a singular spectacle,—a sea of heads. The rugs and embroidered silks displayed, reminded her of processional banners, hung in the nave of a church. She was conscious, moreover, when she closed her eyes, half blinded by the gorgeous colors, of a certain odor appertaining to feminine belongings,—an odor that was the incense of this temple raised in worship of the materiality of woman.

Meanwhile Mouret, standing at the door of the read-

ing-room, was equally conscious of this odor and was intoxicated by it.

"They almost live here now," he said, gaily. "They eat here, and write here! Sometime they will sleep here!"

Paul laughed, although in reality greatly bored by all this humanity, so turbulent in its pursuit of trifles. Did no one of them, with brain and heart equally empty, realize the stupidity and uselessness of life?

Octave Mouret seemed to have lost much of his usual serenity this morning. As soon as he saw Denise and Madame Desforges coming up the stairs, he affected great animation, which increased as they came nearer, and although he did not turn his head toward them, his color deepened, and his eyes had something of the eagerness visible in those of the purchasers at his counters.

"I think you must lose a great deal here," said Paul, looking down on the crowd; "do you not have much stolen?"

"An incalculable amount, my dear fellow," answered Mouret.

And enchanted to have found a subject on which to dilate, he gave a number of details. "In the first place," he said, "there are professional thieves who do little harm, since the police know and watch them. Then there are kleptomaniacs, victims to a disease well recognized by the medical profession—a class apart—also women *enciente*, whose whims beggar description. Not long ago one of these was arrested and when her rooms were searched, two hundred and forty-eight p

of rose-colored gloves were found, stolen from half the shops in Paris."

"That then, is why the expression of these women's eyes is so strange," answered Vallegnose. "Some of them look as if they were mad, with a hungry, gluttonous look in their faces."

"Yes, and we have a great deal of trouble, and yet we can't, of course, let them carry away our goods under their cloaks. Sometimes they are people of considerable importance, and we are forced to arrange the affair."

Mouret's voice trembled as he spoke. He laughed constrainedly. Denise and Henriette passed him at this moment, having with great difficulty disengaged themselves from the crowd. He turned quickly, bowed with the discreet salutation of a friend to Madame Desforges, who, however, wide awake to the situation, saw the look with which he greeted Denise. Yes, it was plain this girl was the rival that her curiosity had led her to seek. In the cloak-room, the saleswomen were in despair. Two of their number were ill, and Madame Frédéric "the second" had tranquilly given in her resignation the previous evening, going to the desk unsummoned, to have her account settled, leaving the *Bonheur* without notice,—in fact behaving toward the House precisely as the House behaved toward their employés.

The entire conversation that morning in this Department, had been of her, and of her reasons for leaving. Clara, who was retained in the house, simply because of Mouret's caprice, declared that Madame Frédéric's

conduct was "very *chic*." Margu  rite dwelt much on Bourdoucle's exasperation, while Madame Aur  lie greatly vexed, said that never in the whole course of her life had she dreamed of such dissimulation.

Although Madame Fr  d  ric had taken no one into her confidence, she was suspected of having left the *Bonheur* to marry the proprietor of some public baths near the markets.

"It is a travelling cloak that you would like to see?" asked Denise, after offering Madame Desforges a chair.

"Yes," answered this lady coldly, being quite determined to be impolite.

The new furniture and decorations of this Department were extremely rich and handsome. High wardrobes of carved oak, mirrors in all the large panels and a red Moquette carpet on the floor.

While Denise went in search of the travelling cloak, Madame Desforges looking about, caught sight of her own reflection in a mirror, and began to study herself. She was growing old then, if she were thus deceived for some young girl. The mirror reflected the entire room, but she saw only her own pale face; she did not hear Clara, who was telling Margu  rite, just behind her, one of her remarkable anecdotes of Madame Fr  d  ric.

"These are our last designs," said Denise, "we have them in several colors."

She displayed four or five wraps; Madame Desforges looked at them contemptuously. "How absurd all those plaits were! And that one looked as if it had been cut out with a hatchet. Who on earth wou

wear a thing like that? Show me something else, Mademoiselle."

Denise folded and unfolded these wraps without one sign of ill temper, and this very serenity was all the more exasperating to Madame Desforges, whose eyes continued to wander to the mirror opposite.

She was so near Denise that she was able to make comparisons.

Was it possible that any one could prefer this insignificant creature to herself? She remembered the girl, she had seen her when she first came to the city, as awkward as when she kept the geese on her native common. She looked better now of course, she held herself better, and her black silk robe fitted her more correctly. But what an air of poverty!

"I will bring you some other styles," said Denise, quietly.

When she returned, the same scene was repeated, the cloths were too thick, or if they were thin they were worthless. Madame Desforges raised her voice in the hope of attracting the attention of Madame Aurélie and inducing her to scold the girl. But Denise since her return had conquered this Department, and felt thoroughly at home. Madame Aurélie had come to recognize in her the rare qualities of a saleswoman, a certain gentle obstinacy, and a smiling conviction.

Madame Aurélie, therefore, shrugged her shoulders and did not interfere.

"If you would kindly describe the style of wrap you desire?" said Denise, with her polite persistency.

"But you have nothing!" cried Madame Desforges. She interrupted herself, surprised at feeling a hand laid on her shoulder. It was Madame Marly, whose mad thirst for expenditure brought her incessantly to this establishment. Her purchases had greatly increased since the cravats, the gloves and the red umbrella.

"Ah!" she said, "you are buying a travelling cloak!"

"By no means," answered Madame Desforges. "They are simply frightful!"

But Madame Marly pounced upon a striped cloak, which she said was very pretty. Her daughter Valentine began to examine it. Then Denise called Marguerite, and bade her bring a certain mantle left over from the year previous, which the latter, at a glance from her companion, presented as a most extraordinary bargain; it had been reduced twice, the original price had been one hundred and fifty francs, it was now one hundred and ten; Madame Marly could not withstand the temptation of a bargain, and bought it.

Meanwhile, behind these ladies, the gossip about Madame Frédéric still went on.

"I tell you," said Clara, "that these quiet little widows are not to be trusted!"

Madame Marly chanced to look around, and seeing Clara, pointed her out to Madame Desforges, with an almost imperceptible movement of the eyelids, saying in a low voice:

"Is not that caprice of Mouret's perfectly incomprehensible?"

Henriette, greatly surprised, looked at Clara, then at Denise, and said:

"No, it is not she, it is the little one, I believe."

And as Madame Marly of course knew no more than she had heard, Madame Desforges, in a louder voice that expressed all the contempt felt by a *grande dame* for chamber maids and grisettes, said:

"Perhaps it is the tall one as well as the little girl; it is more than likely."

Denise had heard. She became very pale, and lifted her innocent eyes to the face of this lady whom she did not know, but who had wounded her so deeply. She suddenly realized that this was the friend of Monsieur Mouret of whom she had heard so much. The eyes of these two women met, and Henriette was made very uncomfortable by the simple dignity and innocence of the young girl.

"Since you have nothing to show me here," she said abruptly, "take me to the suit Department."

"I will go with you," cried Madame Marly. "I must have a costume for Valentine."

Margu rite had placed all the packages in an arm-chair, which she dragged after her on its back legs, while Denise carried only the bundle of foulard.

And a long journey now began. Margu rite went first, dragging the chair like a little carriage. Madame Desforges began to complain. "It was perfectly ridiculous," she said, "to walk miles to find the smallest articles one needed!"

Madame Marly said she was dead of fatigue, but she seemed to enjoy it, stopping at every counter. She was sorely tempted by chemises sold by Pauline. Madame Desforges could easily have made more haste

and released Denise, but she seemed happy in the feeling that the girl was behind her, patient and attentive.

Madame Marly went into ecstasies over some white silk corsets, some fur cuffs sold at a reduced price by reason of the season, and some Russian lace with which table linen was trimmed at this time.

All these things were piled upon the chair, and each salesman who took it in succession found it more unmanageable and heavy.

"This way, Madame," said Denise after each halt.

"How stupid!" cried Madame Desforges, "we shall never get there. Why not have the robes and costumes next the cloaks and mantles?"

Madame Marly, whose eyes dilated with wonder at the wealth and beauty exhibited before her, gave way entirely to the temptation, saying only from time to time:

"Good Heavens! What will my husband say? You are right, there is no order in this establishment. One entirely loses one's head here!"

At the wide landing of the central staircase it was found that the chair could not pass. Mouret had just sent there a quantity of fancy articles, travelling cups and flasks. He had ordered one of his salesmen to exhibit at this same point Japanese and Chinese curiosities, trifles at a low price, which would bring a crowd.

And Madame Marly, while two boys carried her purchases to the floor above, bought six ivory buttons, some silk mice and an alumette stand of *cloisonné* enamel.

On the next floor the same thing continued. Denise,

who had been on her feet since early morning, was dead with fatigue, but she stood erect with her usual gentle politeness.

In the upholstery room Madame Marly stopped before a ravishing *crétonne*, and in the furniture room she discovered a work-table, without which she felt she could not live, while at the same time laughing nervously, she implored Madame Desforges to prevent her from spending any more money.

Suddenly the ladies saw Madame Guibal, who had come up stairs to return some *portières*, which she had bought five days before. She was arguing with the salesman, a tall fellow, who was in consternation at this "return," which deprived him of course of his percentage. He tried to embarrass the lady, feeling sure that she had done some shabby trick, given a ball and put up these *portières*, getting them in this way from the *Bonheur* and returning them rather than to hire them from an upholsterer; he knew such things had been done in economical households.

"Madame must have some reason for returning them, of course," he said. "If she was not satisfied with the designs and colors he would show her others—he had a complete assortment."

To all his insinuations, Madame Guibal simply replied with her quiet air that the *portières* did not please her, and vouchsafed no other explanation. She refused to look at any more, and he could only submit, as the salesmen were bidden to take back the merchandise, even if they knew they were being made use of.

As the three ladies went away together, and Madame

Marly pointed out with remorse the work-table for which she really had no use, Madame Guibal said tranquilly:

"You can return it, you know. You saw how I did it. Let them send it home. Place it in your *salon*, in a few days you will be tired of it. After people have seen it you can send it back."

"That is an excellent idea!" cried Madame Marly, "and if my husband is very angry I will return everything!"

This now became her excuse, and she bought right and left—but in her heart there was no idea of returning them, for she was not a woman of that stamp, she kept all she got!

Finally they reached the robes and costumes. But as Denise was about to hand one of the saleswomen the foulard bought by Madame Desforges, that lady said she had changed her mind, and that she would take one of the travelling cloaks after all, the gray with the hood. Denise was therefore compelled to wait to take the lady back to her Department.

The young girl was fully conscious of the intention of this lady to treat her as if she had been a servant—but she was also resolved to perform her duty, and preserved her calmness, in spite of the revolt and indignation in her heart.

Madame Desforges bought nothing in this room, but Valentine cried out:

"Oh! mamma, look at that costume, it is just my size!"

Madame Guibal then explained to Madame Marly

her tactics. When a robe took her fancy at the *Bonheur*, she ordered it sent home, took the pattern, and then returned it.

Madame Marly bought the costume for her daughter, saying as she did so:

"It is an excellent idea, dear Madame. You are practical!"

Then the ladies, still accompanied by Denise, wandered through the rooms, where they met friend after friend, and finally Madame Bourdelais and her three children. The little ones were laden down with packages. Madeleine had under one arm a robe for herself, Edouard carried several pair of shoes, while Lucien, the younger, was very happy in the possession of a new *kepi*.

"You here, too!" cried Madame Desforges.

"Don't speak of it!" answered her old friend, "I am furious. They appeal to you nowadays through these little ones. You know that I am not often guilty of extravagances for myself, but how can one resist these babies, who want everything they see. I merely came out for a walk, and see the things I have bought."

Mouret again appeared upon the scene, in company with Vallegnose and Monsieur de Boves, and smiled as he listened to what she said. She saw him, and repeated her complaints—gaily enough, but with some real irritation—of the snares laid for mothers.

He, still smiling and enjoying his triumph, bowed respectfully. Monsieur de Boves contrived to say a few words, in a low voice, to Madame Guibal, and

then following her, did his best to lose Vallegnose, who, however, not interested in anything he saw, was not easy to lose.

Denise was still obliged to wait for these ladies. She turned her back on Mouret who, in his turn, affected not to see her. From that moment Madame Desforges, with the marvellous instinct of a jealous woman, no longer doubted. While he complimented her, and walked a few steps at her side, like a gallant host, she was asking herself whether she should let him know her discovery of his treason.

Meanwhile Monsieur de Boves and Vallegnose, walking on in front with Madame Guibal, had reached the lace Department. It was a small luxurious room, with carved oaken cabinets. Yards upon yards of foamy lace were wreathed around columns covered with red velvet, and from one to another of these columns floated laces of different kinds. And on the low cabinets, which served as counters there were piles of boxes filled with the rarest laces.

Two ladies were seated before a piece of mauve silk, on which Deloche was throwing some Chantilly points.

"Why!" cried Vallegnose, in great surprise, "did you not say that Madame de Boves was suffering? There she is with Mademoiselle Blanche."

The Comte started and glanced hastily at Madame Guibal.

"It is certainly she!" he said.

The room was very warm, but the two ladies were pale and held the laces with trembling hands.

"Upon my life! these ladies look as if they were

ruining you," continued Vallegnose, quite pleased with the *rencontre*.

Monsieur de Boves shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who is all the more confident of his wife's good sense, because he never trusts her with a sou.

Madame de Boves had been wandering through the shop for hours, and was literally worn out with fatigue; the sight of so many things for which she had longed all her life, bewildered her and troubled her brain. She lingered long before the tempting boxes, then suddenly as her daughter turned her head away and the salesman moved off, she slipped under her mantle a piece of Point d'Alençon. But she started and dropped it when she heard the voice of Vallegnose saying gayly:

"Ah! we have caught you, Madame."

For a moment she was white and speechless. Then she explained how, being better, she had felt the need of fresh air. And then noticing that Madame Guibal was with her husband, she looked at her with so much dignity that the lady felt constrained to say:

"I was with Madame Desforges, when we met these gentlemen."

The other ladies came up at this moment, accompanied by Mouret, who pointed out Inspector Jouve, who was watching two well-dressed women. "It was very curious," he said, "the number of thieves that were arrested in the lace room." Madame de Boves, who listened with suspended breath, saw herself marched off between two gendarmes, with her forty-five

years, her beauty and the high position of her husband; nevertheless she wished she had slipped some lace up her sleeve.

"But why," said Vallegnose, "do you display so much of this delicate merchandise? You ought not to tempt poor women so far!"

The ladies now separated. It was four o'clock; the rays of the sun entered obliquely through the bay windows on the front, and clouds of dust now reddened in the sunlight thickened the air. Mirrors glittered and the large umbrellas hung against the wall were resplendent like steel, the iron stairs with their gilded grape vines interlaced in the railing glowed in the sunshine.

And at this moment the women reigned, they had taken this great building by assault, and encamped there as in a conquered country.

The salesmen were now only their slaves, over whom they tyrannized as if they had been monarchs. Stout ladies pushed their way about, slender ones became arrogant and exacting, and all agreed in considering the establishment their own. Madame Bourdelais had taken her children to the buffet, where an immense crowd elbowed each other.

After buying her travelling wrap, Madame Desforges went to the desk, trying to think how she could humiliate Denise in Mouret's presence; in what way she could watch both their faces and gain a certainty of the truth.

Monsieur de Boves was in the meanwhile watching his chance of disappearing in the crowd with Madame Guibal, and his wife took it into her head to ask for a

red balloon; though she had bought nothing she would not go away empty handed, and she could give it to the son of her *concierge*. Fourteen thousand balloons had been given away that day at the counter of the *Bonheur*, fourteen thousand balloons had taken flight over Paris, carrying up to Heaven the name of the *Bonheur des Dames*.

The clock struck five; Madame Marly was the only one left of all these ladies; it seemed as if she could not tear herself away; she wandered from room to room restless and dissatisfied. Madame Marly had entered the shop with a cool, fresh face; it was now burning with the unappeased passion excited by the spectacle of all this luxury. When at last she dragged herself away, saying she would pay for the goods when delivered, she was so terrified that her face was drawn like that of a sick woman, and outside the door she shivered in the fresh air and stood still, half bewildered.

That evening, when Denise returned from dinner, a waiter said to her: "Mademoiselle, you are wanted in the manager's room."

She had forgotten the order Mouret had given her, to come to his office after the day's sale was over.

He was standing when she entered. She did not close the door, which remained wide open.

"We are greatly pleased with you, Mademoiselle, and we have decided to testify our approval. You know how Madame Frédéric has left us. To-morrow you will take her place and be our 'second.'"

Denise listened almost stunned. She murmured in a trembling voice:

"But sir, there are saleswomen who have been longer in the Department than I."

"What of that?" he replied. "You are the most capable, the most steady. I select you therefore. Are you not satisfied?"

She colored, feeling a most delightful embarrassment. Her first terror had vanished. Why had she been so disturbed, she asked herself. He looked at her with a faint smile as she stood before him, in her simple black silk dress without an ornament, and her magnificent blonde hair. Her fair skin and her delicacy gave her a great air of refinement.

"You are very kind," she stammered. "I hardly know how to tell you—"

She suddenly ceased speaking; L'Homme was in the doorway, holding in his hand a large leather bag, and with his mutilated arm pressing against his breast an enormous portfolio. Behind him was his son, Albert, with his arms full of bags, the weight of which seemed to bow him down.

"Five hundred eighty-seven thousand, two hundred and ten francs, thirty centimes, sir," shouted the cashier, whose worn and wrinkled face glowed with pleasure.

This gigantic sum was the day's receipts, and the largest sum the *Bonheur* had ever taken in.

"That is glorious!" said Mouret, enchanted. "Put that heavy load down here, my good friend, for you can carry it no farther. I will send it to the central cashier. Yes, put it on my desk, I like to see it there."

Mouret was like a boy in his gayety. The cashier and his son unloaded themselves; two of the bags carried by Albert yawned and set loose streams of copper and silver, one of the bags was filled with gold, and bank notes were in the portfolio. Albert and his father retired, wiping their brows as they went, and Mouret stood still, gazing at the money. Then looking up he saw that Denise was timidly retreating. He smiled and insisted on her return, telling her that he would give her all she could take in her hand. There was an undercurrent of reality beneath this pleasantry.

"Here, try this gold. You could not take more than one thousand francs, your hand is so little."

But she turned very pale and drew back. He loved her then! All at once this conviction came to her, but she was far more overwhelmed by the consciousness that her own heart was beating like a trip-hammer. Why did he persist in talking of this money? He went nearer to her, but to his intense dissatisfaction, Bourdoucle now appeared, having come, he said, to tell him of the enormous sum taken that day in the *Bonheur*.

Denise hurried away, having once more murmured her thanks.

CHAPTER IX.

THE first Sunday in August an inventory was begun which was to be finished that evening. Early in the morning, as on a week day, all the employés were at their post and the work began in the great empty shop, with locked doors.

Denise, however, had not come down stairs at eight o'clock with the other saleswomen. She had been in fact, confined to her room for five days by a sprained ankle, having slipped one morning on the stairs. This sprain was much better, but as Madame Aurélie petted and made much of her now, she made no haste, but dressed slowly, determined, however, to show herself in the cloak room that day. The chambers of the young ladies occupied the entire fifth floor of the new building on the *Rue Monsigny*; there were sixty in all, on the two sides of a long corridor, and extremely comfortable, although still furnished with the same iron bedstead, wardrobe and oak dressing table.

As "the second," Denise was now entitled to one of the largest rooms with Mansard windows opening on the street. Having ample means at present, she indulged in several minor luxuries, a red eiderdown quilt covered with guipure, a rug before the wardrobe, and two blue vases on her dressing table, in which some roses were slowly fading.

She tried to walk up and down her room, without support, but found that doing so caused her great suffering. She had been quite right in declining to dine that evening with her Uncle Baudu, and in requesting her aunt to take P  p   to walk, for she had sent the child back to Madame Gras. Jean, who had come to see her the previous evening, was also to dine with his uncle.

She was just saying to herself that she would be very careful and would retire very early that night, in order to give her ankle a good rest, when Madame Cabiu, the matron, knocked and gave her a letter with an air of mystery.

When the door closed upon this woman, Denise, amazed at the equivocal smile with which she had been favored, opened the letter. She instantly turned deadly pale and dropped upon a chair; it was a letter from Mouret, in which he congratulated her on her recovery and begged her to come down to dine with him that evening, as of course she could not go out. The tone of this note, at once familiar and paternal, was in no degree wounding, but it was impossible to misunderstand it. All the *Bonheur* understood the true significance of these invitations. Clara had accepted such an one, as had several others, all those girls in fact, whom Mouret had favored with his especial notice. And the pale cheeks of the young girl became deep crimson.

Then dropping the letter on her lap, with her heart beating almost audibly, Denise sat with her eyes fixed on the blinding light of one of the windows. She

was now realizing the great truth, she now knew that when she trembled as he passed, it was not from fear—she realized that her uneasiness of those early days was but her ignorance of love—her girlish timidity. She did not reason, she merely felt that she had loved him from the first moment when she trembled and stammered before him. She loved him even when she feared him as a stern task-master, she loved him even when she dreamed of Hutten in her great need of affection. She knew that she had never loved, could never love, any other man than this one. She went over all the past which was even remotely connected with him, the sternness of her early acquaintance with him, and then that delightful walk under the dark shadows of the Tuileries. The letter slid to the floor, and Denise continued to look out of the window into the dazzling sunlight.

There came a sudden knock at her door, and she hastily snatched up the letter and thrust it into her pocket. It was Pauline, who had made some excuse to escape from her duties.

But as it was forbidden to enter these rooms, or for two to shut themselves up there, Denise led her to the end of the corridor, where there was a *salon* gallantly bestowed upon these young women by the managers, where they could remain until eleven o'clock.

This *salon* looked like one in a *Hôtel*: it had a large center table and a piano, the sofas and chairs were covered with white.

"You see I can walk now," said Denise. "I was just going down stairs."

"What mistaken zeal!" cried Pauline. "How glad I would be to lounge a little, if I had any excuse!"

They seated themselves on a sofa, side by side. Pauline's manner had changed since her friend's promotion. To her persistent cordiality was now added a shade of respect—a certain surprise at seeing the little country girl on the road to fortune. Denise was sincerely attached to her, and confided in her alone, treating the other two hundred, at present connected with the establishment, with mere politeness.

"What has gone wrong?" asked Pauline, when she noticed her friend's agitation.

"Nothing at all," answered the other, doing her best to smile.

"I know better; there is something. You trust me no longer, then, since you will not confide your sorrows to me?"

Then Denise, in her agitation, hardly knew what she did. She handed the letter to her friend, saying as she did so:

"He has written to me."

As yet, they had never spoken openly of Mouret. But this very silence was an admission of their secret pre-occupation. Pauline knew everything. After reading the letter, she put her arm around her friend's waist and whispered in her ear.

"I thought, to be frank with you, that this letter had come long since. All the *Bonheur* thinks so, I assure you. You see he appointed you to Madame Frédéric's place so quickly, and is always hovering about wherever you are!"

She kissed Denise on the forehead, and then said :

"You will dine with him to-night, of course?"

Denise looked at her in silence for a moment, and then all at once burst into passionate weeping, burying her face on the shoulder of her friend.

Pauline was astonished.

"Pray, dear child, be calm. Surely there is nothing in this letter which need disturb you like this."

"Let me weep," sobbed Denise. "If you only knew how sore my heart is. I have been in despair ever since this letter reached me. Let me weep, it soothes me."

Deeply compassionate, though totally unable to understand the meaning of her friend's tears, Pauline did her best to offer consolation.

"He never sees Clara now," she said. "It is true that he occasionally goes to see a lady outside, but what of that? It is foolish to be jealous of a man in such a position. He has so much money, and then, after all, he is the master."

Denise listened; and had she been in doubt as to the nature of her own feelings, the anguish awakened by Clara's name, and the allusion to Madame Desforges, would have enlightened her. She heard Clara's shrill voice, and she saw Madame Desforges sweeping haughtily through the shop.

"You would go then?" she asked suddenly.

Pauline, without an instant's consideration, cried out:

"Go? Of course I should—how could one do otherwise?"

Then reflecting, she added :

"I would not now, of course, as I am to marry Baugh, and it would be a mean thing to do."

It was quite true. Baugh had left the *Bon Marché* to enter the *Bonheur des Dames*, and was to marry Pauline early in August.

Bourdoucle did not like matrimony among his people. Nevertheless, he gave his sanction, and they hoped to obtain from him a fortnight's leave for their honeymoon.

"You see!" stammered Denise, "when a man loves you he ought to marry you. Baugh is going to marry you."

Pauline laughed heartily.

"But, dear child, it is not the same thing. Baugh marries me because he is Baugh. He is my equal, while Monsieur Mouret— Do you think Monsieur Mouret can marry one of his saleswomen?"

She laughed still more, and pressed a kiss on the fair locks of Denise.

Her heavy face and small eyes assumed an expression of maternal commiseration. Then she rose and went to the piano, where she played *le Roi Dagobert* with one finger—probably to enliven the situation. To this desolate looking *salon* rose the cries of the street—the distant shout of a vender of green peas.

Denise threw herself back on the sofa, in another paroxysm of tears and sobs, which she did her best to smother in her handkerchief.

"More tears!" exclaimed Pauline, turning round.
 "You are really very unreasonable. Why did you

bring me here? We might just as well have remained in your room."

Then, leaving the piano, Pauline knelt at the side of her friend and read her a lecture. How many women would gladly be in her place! Besides, if the thing did not please her, if she did not wish to go, she had but to say no, without crying her heart out about it. But she ought to reflect, before she risked her position by a refusal.

The advice and lecture ended in a laughing joke or two, just as a step was heard in the corridor.

Pauline ran to the door to hastily inspect.

"Hush!" she said, "it is Madame Aurélie, and I must be off. And now dry your eyes. It is not necessary to allow everybody to know what has occurred."

When Denise was alone, she rose to her feet and with difficulty crossed the room, to close the piano, which her friend had left open. She heard Madame Aurélie knock at her door and went out to meet her.

"What! are you up?" cried the forewoman. "What imprudence! I came to beg you to stay in your room, for we really do not require your services down stairs to-day."

Denise assured her that she was much better, and that she should prefer some occupation.

"I will not over-exert myself, Madame. You will let me sit down, and I will attend to the books."

They went down stairs together. Madame Aurélie in a most benevolent manner obliged Denise to lean on her shoulder. She had noticed the young girl's red

eye and watched her stealthily. The forewoman knew many things.

This was a most unexpected victory. Denise had conquered this Department. After suffering tortures there for ten months without softening the hearts of her comrades, she had come back there and in a few weeks had conquered them all. The demonstrations of tenderness from Madame Aurélie, had been of great assistance to her in this wearisome task of conciliating these stubborn natures. It was whispered that the forewoman was Mouret's confidante, and it certainly had a little of that air when she took the young girl so warmly under her protection.

Denise, however, had done her very best to disarm her enemies, and her task was all the more difficult, for she had also to win their forgiveness for her promotion. The other saleswomen muttered at the injustice, and declared that she had coaxed this favor from Mouret some day at dinner, and allowed their imagination to invent some abominable details. In spite, however, of all this, the title of "the second" was not without its effect. Denise wielded her authority in a manner that astonished every one, even the most hostile. And among the latest comers she found some admirers who flattered her. Her sweetness and modesty finished the conquest, and brought all but Clara to her side; this last stood sulkily aloof, and even went so far as to murmur "milkmaid," but this witticism fell unheeded to the ground. During Mouret's brief caprice she had indulged in the most impertinent indolence. But he soon wearied of her, and she did not take the trouble

to be jealous of him, and was satisfied with having been preferred and having nothing to do.

She, however, considered that Denise had robbed her of the succession to Madame Frédéric, not that she would have accepted it, on account of the work, but she was vexed at the want of courtesy shown her.

"Look at the invalid!" she muttered when she saw Madame Aurélie assisting Denise.

Marguélite shrugged her shoulders.

"Funny, is it not?" she said.

The clock struck nine. The sky was cloudless and the streets crowded with people hurrying to stations; people who were eager to spend the day in the country.

The doors of the shop were closed, although the windows were left wide open, to obtain the air, and people as they passed looked in, amazed at the extraordinary activity they witnessed.

Each of the thirty-nine Departments was doing its own task, unheeding those of all the others.

"Why did you come down to-day?" asked Marguélite politely, of Denise. "You will only make yourself ill, and we have all the help we really need."

"That is precisely what I told her," said Madame Aurélie, "but she was determined to do her share."

The saleswomen all crowded around Denise, and the work was momentarily interrupted. She was asked to repeat over and over again the story of her sprain. Finally Madame Aurélie placed her in a chair before a table, and it was understood that she should write down the articles as they were called out. On inventory Sundays every employé who could hold a pen was

pushed into the service, that the work could be all accomplished in one day. It therefore came to pass that Denise sat at a table with the cashier L'Homme and the boy Joseph, both leaning over huge sheets of paper.

"Five mantles, cloth, fur trimmed, third size, two hundred and forty francs," called out Marguérite. "Four ditto, first size, at two hundred and seventy."

The work began. Behind Marguérite, three saleswomen were emptying the wardrobes and classifying the articles, and when she had called them out they were thrown on the table, where the piles soon became very high. L'Homme wrote, Joseph copied his list for the managers. During this same time Madame Aurélie, aided by three other saleswomen, was calling out the silk garments, which Denise wrote down.

Clara's duty was to arrange these last in a way that would take up the smallest possible room on the tables. But she made very little effort to perform this task.

"Tell me," she said to a little saleswoman, a comparatively new arrival, "is your salary to be raised? The 'second' is to receive two thousand francs, which, with her percentage, will mount up to seven thousand."

The little saleswoman, still counting the circulars answered, that if they did not give her eight hundred francs she should take herself off. The increase in salaries was always announced the day after the inventory was made, which was also the date when the condition of their affairs being known to the managers, the heads of the various Departments received their interest on the money made that year, over and above that of the previous year.

Consequently every one worked with a will, and there was no talk except about money. The report was in circulation that Madame Aurélie would receive seventy-five thousand francs. Such a sum naturally excited the envy of all these women. Marguerite, the best saleswoman after Denise, had made four thousand five hundred francs, fifteen hundred francs salary, and three thousand francs as percentage, while Clara had but two thousand five hundred francs in all.

"What do I care!" cried the latter, addressing the little saleswoman again; "if my father were dead I should show them plenty of money. But all the same I am none too well pleased to hear of the seven thousand francs belonging to this bit of creation!"

Then Madame Aurélie turned and stopped this conversation with her most imperial air.

"Hush! young ladies! I really can hear nothing that is said."

Then she began her catalogue again:

"Seven mantles, Sicilienne, first size, at one hundred and thirty; three pelisses, Surah, second size, at a hundred and fifty."

"Have you got these down, Mademoiselle Denise?"

"Yes, Madame."

Clara busied herself a few moments with the garments on the tables. But presently she gave them up to talk with a salesman who was looking for her. It was Mignol, the glover, who had deserted his counter. He whispered a request that she would lend him twenty francs; he already owed her thirty, having borrowed them one day when he had lost on a horse. This time

she had expended her salary in advance, and had but ten francs in her pocket, which she lent willingly enough.

And she had now much to say of a certain restaurant and a party of six where the women had paid their scot. It was really much better, for every one felt more independent.

Then Mignol, who still pursued his twenty francs, went to L'Homme and whispered in his ear. The poor cashier thus cornered, seemed in great distress. He did not dare refuse, and was searching his pockets for a ten-franc piece, when Madame Aurélie, astonished at not hearing Marguérite's voice any more, looked around and seeing Mignol, understood at once that he was the cause of hindrance. She peremptorily ordered him back to his own Department. "He had no right," she said, "to come here and disturb the young ladies in their work."

The truth was she disliked this young man, who was the intimate friend of her son Albert, and his constant accomplice in adventures, some of which she felt sure would be most disastrous some day.

When therefore, Mignol disappeared with the ten francs, she could not prevent herself from saying to her husband :

"How can you be so foolish? Why should you lend money to that fellow?"

"How could I refuse?" he replied.

She closed his mouth with a contemptuous shrug of her broad shoulders, and turning towards the saleswomen, who were stealthily enjoying this family explanation, she said, severely :

"Come, Mademoiselle Margu  rite, we must not go to sleep; we shall never get through at this rate."

"Twenty paletots, cashmere, lined, fourth size, eighteen francs, fifty centimes," began Margu  rite, in her sing-song voice.

L'Homme began to write again. His salary had been advanced from time to time, until now he received nine thousand francs, but as Madame Aur  lie made three times that amount, he was still very humble before her.

The work went on; but Clara had invented an amusement for herself. She was teasing Joseph in regard to a passion, by which she declared he was possessed for a young lady in another Department. This person was quite twenty-eight and thin and pale. She was a proteg  e of Madame Desforges who had induced Mouret to take her into the *Bonheur*. The story was a touching one. She was an orphan, the last of the Fontenailles, an old family in Poitou. She had come to Paris with a drunken father, and through all had kept herself pure and womanly. Her education was too imperfect to permit her to teach in a school, or give lessons on the piano. Mouret generally refused to listen when such persons were recommended to him. He said that women with such antecedents were invariably the most difficult to get on with; they were exacting and incapable. Besides, no one was born a saleswoman; an apprenticeship was needed for a position that demanded such tact and delicacy. Nevertheless, he took this proteg  e of Madame Desforges, and placed her in a Department where she had very little to do, but received three francs per day, which permitted her †

keep body and soul together in a little room in the *Rue d'Argenteuil*. Meeting her daily, looking so sad, Joseph's heart was touched. He never acknowledged this, but colored deeply when the young women in the cloak-room jested him about Mademoiselle de Fontenailles, for they had noticed him constantly hanging around the door of the room next her own.

Mademoiselle de Fontenailles had been summoned to the *lingerie* Department, where her services were needed for the inventory, and as Joseph kept looking into that room, the saleswomen in the cloak Department were greatly amused and began to laugh.

He became confused and dropped his face low over his papers, while Marguérite to silence the titters that followed this movement, called out:

"Fourteen jackets, English cloth, second size, fifteen francs."

Suddenly Madame Aurélie, who was counting the circulars, said with slow and stately dignity:

"A little lower, if you please. We are not in a market; and you must permit me to say that I should like you all to postpone your jokes until you are less busy and time is less precious."

At that moment, Clara, who was not on her guard, came to grief. All the high piles of goods which had been so carefully arranged, slipped off the table to the floor.

"There!" cried the forewoman, greatly enraged. "What did I tell you! Pay a little more attention, Mademoiselle Clara, for this is quite unendurable!"

But no one heeded her; Mouret and Bourdouce at

that moment appeared. Clara began to gather up the scattered garments, but Mouret did not interrupt the work. He stood silently looking on for a few moments. But when he saw Denise, he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Why had she come down stairs?" he asked. He turned to Madame Aurélie and seemed about to speak, but changed his mind and went on.

Denise looked up and saw Mouret, but was unmoved and continued her writing. She had given way to her first agitation; tears and sobs had nearly suffocated her, but she had now regained her usual serenity and courage. Her eyes were clear and her cheek without a flush; she had resolved to keep her heart well in check. The clock struck ten, and the hurry and confusion increased, in spite of which, every saleswoman and salesman had by this time learned that Mouret had written a letter to Denise, asking her to dine with him. Pauline had been guilty of a great indiscretion. On leaving Denise, she met Deloche on the stairs and without noticing that Liénard was directly behind, she opened her heart at once.

"It is settled, my friend. She has just received a letter from him. He invites her to dine with him to-night."

Deloche turned deadly pale. He of course, instantly understood, for he often questioned Pauline, and they had almost daily talks about their mutual friend; they spoke frankly to each other of Mouret's tenderness for her, and of the invitation which would finally end the adventure. Pauline often lectured him for wasting his

affections on Denise, and she shrugged her shoulders when he praised the young girl for resisting Mouret.

"Her foot is better," she answered, "she is coming down stairs. For heaven's sake don't look so dismal. She is in great luck, I think!"

And Pauline hurried on to her work.

"Ah!" murmured Liénard, who had heard all this, "I understand now, it is the young lady with the sprained foot, whom you defended last night at the *café*." And he in his turn hurried back to his counter, where he told the story of the letter to four or five salesmen. Ten minutes later the tale was known to every one.

Liénard's words referred to a scene that had taken place the previous evening at the *café Saint-Roch*. Deloche and Liénard now lived together, Liénard had taken Hutten's chamber at the *Hôtel de Smyrne*, when Hutten after his promotion took a small apartment consisting of three rooms. The two clerks came together to the *Bonheur* in the morning, and waited for each other at night. Their chambers were next each other and looked out on the same foul court-yard, the stench from which permeated the entire *Hôtel*.

The two got on well together in spite of their dissimilarity, one spending his father's money freely, the other without a sou, torturing his brain with plans of economy. They had, however, one thing in common, their want of success as salesmen, which left them vegetating at their counters. After leaving their daily duties at the *Bonheur* they spent the rest of their time at the *café Saint-Roch*, which about half-past eight was crowded with customers. The noise was deafening,

loud laughs, the rattle of dominos, all heard through thick clouds of tobacco. Beer and coffee were drunk profusely. Liénard called for the most expensive articles, while Deloche contented himself with a glass of beer which he took four hours to drink.

It was there that he heard Favier, at the next table, speak very lightly of Denise, telling how she liked to mount the stairs before him and hold up her dress that he might see her pretty ankles. It was with difficulty that Deloche refrained from slapping Favier's face; Liénard coaxed him away, but in his excitement, he said to his friend many things that later he would gladly have recalled.

"I know her," he said, "I know him too. She has never liked any man; yes, she liked Hutten, but he never knew it, and can't boast of ever touching the tips of her fingers."

The story of this quarrel had greatly amused the *Bonheur*, who heard it in an exaggerated form, and now came the account of Mouret's letter to increase their amusement.

It was to a salesman in the silk room that Liénard first told the news. Here the work of the inventory was making wonderful progress; Favier and two clerks were on high steps, clearing off the shelves, while others measured the remnants and called out the prices. The silks were then thrown down on the floor. Other employés were writing. Albert L'Homme was assisting these last; he was very pale after a night's dissipation. The silk room was filled with sunshine.

"Pray put down the awnings," cried Bouthemont,

as he overlooked this work. "This sun is insupportable."

Favier grumbled as he reached up for a pile of silks:

"It is perfectly abominable to keep people at work in such weather as this! There is no danger of rain on the day when an inventory is taken! Here we are kept under bolts and bars like galley slaves while all the rest of Paris are taking their pleasure!"

He handed the silk to Hutten. On the ticket was the original number of yards and the amount since sold, which greatly simplified their labor.

Hutten called out:

"Fancy silk, checked, twenty-six yards, at six francs fifty."

And this silk was thrown upon the pile lying upon the floor.

Then he continued a controversy with Favier.

"Then he wanted to strike you?" he asked.

"Certainly he did. I was quietly drinking my beer. He need not have been so silly; the girl has just received a letter from the manager inviting her to dinner. Everybody is talking about it."

Favier handed him another piece of silk.

"Ditto, twenty-nine yards," called Hutten.

Then he said in a low voice:

"You know the sort of life she led under the roof of that old rascal Bonnat?"

The whole silk room was now astir, although the work went on. The name of the young girl was tossed from mouth to mouth. Even Bouthemont, who enjoyed tales of this kind, hazarded a coarse joke or two,

at which he was the first to laugh. Just then Mignol appeared with the money he had borrowed, and as he handed ten francs to Albert he heard the story of the letter, and made so coarse a remark that Bouthemont saw himself obliged to interfere.

"Enough! gentlemen, enough! It is at all events none of our business. Go on, Monsieur Hutten, go on!"

"Fancy silk, small checks, twenty-seven yards, six francs fifty," continued the latter in reply.

The pens went to work again, the pieces of silk fell with a thud to the floor, where the piles were rapidly growing, and the enumeration of fancy silks went steadily on. Favier remarked in a low voice that it was a fine selection. The managers ought to be pleased. Bouthemont was probably the best buyer in Paris, but as a salesman he was not worth a pair of old shoes.

Hutten was delighted at this praise, as he had himself introduced Bouthemont at the *Bonheur des Dames* to drive Robineau away, and was doing his best to undermine him and obtain his situation. It was the same old war as before, insinuations whispered in the ear of the managers, excess of zeal to awaken their attention. In short the campaign was fully marked out and conducted with deceitful amiability.

Meanwhile Favier, to whom Hutten showed a new condescension, watched him coldly and contemptuously as if he were counting how many mouthfuls he could make of the little man, and was only waiting for his comrade to eat Bouthemont, to devour him in his turn. He aspired to the place of "the second" if Hutten suc-

ceeded in ousting Bouthemont. And both these men in the feverish expectation that influenced all the employés in the *Bonheur*, talked of increase of salaries, while at the same time continuing to call out the number of yards, and the prices. Bouthemont would certainly make his thirty thousand francs this year. Hutten would make ten. Favier estimated his salary and percentage at five thousand five hundred.

Each year the salesmen were promoted, and their pay increased, as officers were promoted during a campaign.

"Are we never to be done with these little fancy silks?" said Bouthemont suddenly. "Upon my word it seems to me that we sell only black silks nowadays."

His gay face grew suddenly dark as he looked down on the piles at his feet, while Hutten in a voice of perceptible triumph, continued to repeat:

"Fancy silks, small check, twenty-two yards, six francs fifty centimes."

There was still a long shelf covered with the same, but as Favier handed the last piece to Hutten, he said in a low voice:

"I came near forgetting. Do you know that the new 'second' in the cloak room has had a great weakness for you?"

The young man looked as he felt, greatly surprised.

"How could you know it, if it were true?" he inquired.

"Oh! that fool of a Deloche let it out. I remember the time now. I used to see her wandering about the shop to meet you."

Huten was in fact greatly flattered, but he answered with an air of contempt:

"I like women with a little more flesh on their bones, and then, too, one can't go with every one like Mouret himself."

He interrupted himself, and called out:

"White *Poult de soie*, forty yards, eight francs, seventy-five centimes!"

"At last!" murmured Bouthemont, with an air of relief.

But a bell was heard. It was for the second table, which was Favier's. He came down from the high steps; another salesman took his place. It was now almost impossible to step upon the floor—boxes, cases and shelves had disgorged their contents. From the next room came the dull thud of pieces of cotton, as they fell on the floor—and a loud rattling of paste-board boxes from the stocking counter. Sharp voices called out figures—it was like a wintry storm whistling through the branches in January.

Favier finally reached the stairs that led to the refectories, which, since the changes and enlargements in the *Bonheur des Dames*, were on the fourth floor of the new building. He presently overtook Deloche and Liénard, and then Mignol.

"Deuce take it all!" he said, in the corridor that led to the kitchen, where he stopped to read the *menu* on the blackboard. "They mean to make a *fête* of this inventory—chicken or leg of mutton, with artichokes dressed with oil."

Mignol sneered, as he murmured:

"There must certainly be a disease among the chickens."

Deloche and Liénard had taken their portions, and gone on. Then Favier said in a loud voice at the wicket:

"Chicken!"

But he was obliged to wait; one of the assistants had cut his finger, and was having it wrapped up. He stood, therefore, looking into the kitchen, with its gigantic furnace, and its arrangement of pulleys and iron rods to lift heavy pots, which four men could not have raised. Several cooks, looking deadly pale in the red light from the fire, were attending to the big soup pots, while hanging against the wall were grid-irons, large enough to broil martyrs, sauce-pans in which a sheep could have been fricasseed, monumental plate warmers, and a basin of running water. On the left was a small room, where scullions were washing dishes, and on the right a huge pantry, in which great pieces of meat hung on iron hooks.

A machine for paring potatoes was busy at work, with the regular tic-tac of a mill, and two little wagons were just going to the fountain laden with salads, which required to be freshened up.

"Chicken," said Favier again, impatiently.

Then, turning away, he said in a lower voice:

"It is disgusting! One of the fellows has cut himself, and the blood has dripped all over the food."

Mignol wished to see, and a number of the other clerks crowded up, with loud laughter and rude pushes. The two young men, Favier and Mignol, still

stood at the wicket, exchanging remarks over the utensils, which even to the spits and larding needles were gigantic. Two thousand dinners and two thousand breakfasts were served there daily, and the number of employés was increasing weekly.

It was a gulf which swallowed up a hundred and twenty pounds of butter, forty-eight bushels of potatoes, and half a ton of meat, and where, at every meal, about a thousand quarts of wine were consumed. "At last!" muttered Favier, when he received his plate.

"Chicken!" said Mignol, behind him.

And the two men, each carrying his own plate, entered the refectory after taking their wine from the *buffet*, while behind them the word "chicken" was perpetually repeated, and the cook's fork took out the pieces with the regular movement of a clock.

The present refectory of the clerks was an immense hall, where five hundred could be seated with ease at mahogany tables running up and down the room. At the two ends were tables placed across. These tables were reserved for the inspectors and heads of Departments, and in the centre was a counter for the display and sale of "extras." Long windows on the right and the left flooded the room with light, the ceiling looked low, though in reality high, by reason of the enormous size of the room. The only ornaments on the buff, painted walls were the cabinets for the napkins.

There was no cloth on the tables, and there was consequently a frightful noise made by the plates.

"You have a leg, too, I see, Mignol," said Favier, as he took his seat.

"Yes, the chickens we use here have an extra quantity of legs, you know," answered Mignol quietly.

In spite of these satirical remarks, the food had greatly improved. Mouret no longer paid a man a fixed sum. He had a service, organized as in one of the Departments of the shop—there was a Chef, a sub-Chef, and an Inspector, and if this arrangement was more expensive in one way, it was more economical in another, as it enabled him to obtain more work from his better fed employés, a humanitarian calculation which had greatly astonished Bourdoucle.

"Mine is very good," said Mignol, "hand me the bread."

The big loaf went the rounds, and each took a slice, the last one sheathing the knife again in the crust. The tables were now full, and every one steadily eating. There was a rattle of knives and forks, a gurgling of wine poured from the bottles, and sounds from five hundred jaws energetically at work. There was, as yet, very little conversation.

Deloche was seated between Baugh and Liénard, almost opposite Favier. They looked at each other with vindictive hatred, while their neighbors, who knew of the quarrel of the previous evening, watched them stealthily. There was a good deal of laughter at Deloche, who was always in a famished condition, and who invariably had the bad luck to fall on the worst morsel. This time he had the neck of a chicken, and the remains of a carcass. He took no notice of these jests, but swallowed huge mouthfuls of bread, and

picked the neck with the infinite care of a youth who had been brought up with respect for meat.

• "Why don't you take it back?" said Baugh.

But Deloche shrugged his shoulders. What was the use? He never gained anything in that way.

"You know the bobbin-winders have their club now," said Mignol, suddenly. "They meet at a wine merchant's, in the Rue Saint Honoré, who lets them a room on Saturdays."

He was talking of the salesmen in the Haberdashery Department.

Conversation around the table now began, and there were only a few with their heads obstinately bent over their plates.

The employés of the *Bonheur* were each year becoming more fastidious and accomplished. Half of them spoke English or German. They no longer thought it *chic* to go to the *cafés chantant* to hiss the ugly singers. No, they formed clubs instead.

"Have they a piano?" asked Liénard.

"Of course the Bobbin Club has a piano," answered Mignol, "and they play and sing. And they have one member, little Bavoux, who reads verses!"

The gayety increased; they pretended to laugh at Bavoux, but in reality felt the highest respect for him. They had much to say about a new piece at the Vaudeville, where a "counter jumper" played a conspicuous part, and then they anxiously inquired at what hour they would probably be released that evening.

In order to rid the room of the smell of food, the windows were opened, though the awnings were low-

ered to shut out the hot August sun — the air that came in was dry and hot.

"The idea of being shut up here on a Sunday like this!" repeated Favier.

This reflection brought up the inventory again. The year had been a wonderful success; and then they fell to discussing the augmentation of salaries, and the percentage on their sales—the everlasting subject which was of paramount interest to all—and the noise finally became intolerable, but the inspectors had received orders to be very indulgent that day.

Mignol suddenly said:

"Who is it that does not like artichokes? I will sell my dessert for his plate of artichokes."

No one answered — everybody liked artichokes. This breakfast was regarded as a feast, for there were peaches for dessert.

"He has invited her to dinner," said Favier to his neighbor on the right. He was finishing his story. "You did not know it then?"

The entire table knew it, and were tired of talking of it; nevertheless, jests again flew up and down the table. Deloche turned very pale, and sat with his eyes fixed on Favier, who now said in a most provoking way:

"Well, if he likes bones, he will have them now."

He dropped his head as he uttered these words, for Deloche, yielding to an irresistible movement, threw a glass of wine full in his face, with the words:

"Take that, liar!"

There was general confusion; only a few drops had

fallen on Favier's hair, while his neighbors were liberally bespattered and excessively angry.

"What a brute the fellow is! He deserves to have his ears cuffed."

But the voices dropped, as one of the inspectors approached the table; it was entirely unnecessary to inform the administration of the quarrel—and Favier muttered:

"Lucky for him that the wine did not touch me!"

When Deloche, still trembling from head to foot, wanted to drink to hide his emotion, and mechanically extended his hand to his empty glass, there was an explosion of loud laughter. He dropped his glass and went to work awkwardly on his artichokes.

"Hand that *carafe* to Deloche, he is thirsty," said Mignol, quietly.

The laughter increased as the young men took clean plates from the piles placed on the table at equal distances, and the waiters handed about peaches in baskets.

Deloche sat with bowed head, seemingly unconscious of all these jests—in reality, he was overwhelmed with regret for what he had done. These people were wise, when they asked him by what right he undertook her defense, and they would have every reason to believe all sorts of things about an innocent woman, all because of his imprudence. It was his usual luck—he ought to have known by this time that he never yielded to the impulses of his heart without committing some atrocious folly.

Tears came into his eyes. Was it not his own fault

if the whole shop were talking of the letter written by Mouret. He heard them all sneering at the invitation, of which he alone had been informed, and he accused himself of stupidity in allowing Pauline to speak in his presence.

"Why did you repeat what you heard?" he whispered to Liénard. "You did very wrong."

"I!" answered Liénard, amazed. "I mentioned it only to two or three persons in confidence. How do things ever spread as they do?"

When Deloche finally drank a glass of water, there was another roar of laughter from the clerks, who were lying back in their chairs waiting for the bell, which should summon them again to their work. At the centre counter few extras were called for, as that day the house presented the coffee—smoking cups stood around the table, and not a breath of air came in at the windows. One of the awnings was put up, and a ray of sunshine streamed athwart the hall. The noise was so great that the bell was not at first heard. Then the crowd slowly rose and filed out of the room.

Deloche lingered until the last, to escape the witticisms at the expense of Denise, which were still bandied about. Even Baugh, who was usually the last to leave the dining-room, had gone, and met Pauline on her way to the "ladies' refectory." It was a daily manœuvre by which they contrived to see each other for a moment.

Denise, who was slowly and painfully mounting the stairs—for her foot was again paining her greatly—saw the meeting, and the kiss exchanged in a corner.

"You must not tell," stammered Pauline, blushing deeply.

Baugh, big as he was, trembled like a little boy, as he murmured:

"If you did, they would turn us both off at a minute's notice. They know we are to be married, but they will not take that into consideration."

Denise pretended not to understand what he meant, and Baugh hurried away, just as Deloche appeared. He came to Denise and tried to apologize. She did not at first know what he meant. But when he said that Pauline had spoken in Liénard's presence, the young girl grasped the meaning of the whispers she had heard all that morning. The story of the letter was known to every one. She began to tremble as she did when the letter first reached her.

"I did not know that Liénard was there!" cried Pauline, "and after all, what does it matter, they must have something to talk about."

"My dear," said Denise finally, in her usual little quiet way, "I do not intend to reproach you. You have told only the truth. I have received a letter and I must reply to it." Deloche went away heart-broken, having understood that the young girl accepted the situation, and would go to the rendezvous that evening. When the two saleswomen had breakfasted, in a small room next to the great dining-room where the women were served in a more comfortable way, Pauline assisted Denise down stairs again. The hurry and confusion down stairs had increased, for they were all determined to finish before dark. Through the closed win-

dows occasional persons lounged past, wearied with the *ennui* of a hot Sunday. Three big girls stood with their faces pressed against the glass, boldly watching what was going on inside the shop.

When Denise returned to her Department, Madame Aurélie left Marguérite to complete her task, while she retired with Denise into the cutting-room, the door of which she left open, that she might still exercise a certain supervision over the young ladies under her.

This room was very large, containing a few chairs and three long tables. In a corner were the huge mechanical scissors with which patterns were cut. From morning until night this machine was at work. Silk and wool, linen and cloth, all passed under it. Between the windows was a small printing press with which the tickets and lists were printed.

"You can read these lists to me," said Madame Aurélie.

When Denise had got through these lists, she began to add up long columns of figures while Madame Aurélie disappeared. Returning in a few minutes she brought with her Mademoiselle de Fontenailles, who was no longer needed in the next room, and where in fact she was having rather a hard time, as the women, led by Clara, were joking Joseph in regard to her.

"Sit by me," said Denise, greatly compassionate; "here, this inkstand will do for us both." Mademoiselle de Fontenailles could not find words to express her gratitude. Her eyes and complexion were equally dull, and only her hands gave the smallest indication

of her aristocratic birth; they were white and slender. The laughter died away, and the work went on steadily, for Mouret now once more appeared. He stopped, surprised not to see Denise. He nodded to Madame Aurélie, who instantly obeyed the summons. He said a few words to her in a low voice, and she looked toward the next room. She was undoubtedly telling him that the young girl had been weeping.

"Let me see the list," said Mouret, suddenly.

"Yes," answered the forewoman, "but I must ask you to step in here, as we could do nothing in this confusion."

He followed her into the cutting-room. Clara was not duped by this manœuvre, and she muttered some coarse joke under her breath. But Marguérite threw her a pile of cloaks with a warning look. "The second" was obliging and pleasant, why should they interfere in her affairs? The whole room became accomplices, and L'Homme and Joseph were suddenly deaf, while Inspector Jouve, who had fully comprehended Madame Aurélie's tactics, began to walk up and down before the door of the cutting-room with the regular pace of a well-drilled functionary who mounts guard over the pleasures of his superior.

"Give the lists to Monsieur Mouret," said the woman, as she entered.

Denise obeyed, and then sat still with lowered lids. She had started slightly, but quickly regained her self-control, although the faint color in her cheek faded away. Mouret seemed absorbed in the lists, and did not look at the young girl. Entire silence reigned

Then Madame Aurélie, going to Mademoiselle de Fontenailles, who had not turned her head, looked over her shoulder and seemed discontented with her addition of the long columns of figures.

"You can go," she said, "and help them in the next room. It is plain that you are not accustomed to figures."

Mademoiselle de Fontenailles returned to the cloak-room, where her appearance was greeted with whispers. Joseph, under the laughing eyes of these demoiselles, made mistakes in his writing. Clara was delighted to have some assistance, and yet could not refrain from some petty incivilities toward the new comer.

"Very good! very good!" murmured Mouret, as he continued to examine the list. Madame Aurélie could not see how she was to get out of the room in a decent manner. She was furious with her husband that he had not sense enough to make some excuse to send for her.

Finally Marguérite had the intelligence to come to the door and ask to speak to her.

"I am coming," answered the forewoman in a dignified tone, rejoiced that she at last had some pretence for leaving Mouret and Denise alone. Her air was so haughty, and her imperial features so noble, that the giggling saleswomen were silenced.

Mouret laid the lists on the table, and looked down on the young girl, who sat with her pen uplifted in her fingers. She did not avoid his gaze, but became very pale.

"You will come this evening?" he said, in a low voice.

"No, sir," she replied, "I cannot; my brothers will dine with my uncle, and I have promised to be there with them."

"But your foot! you walk with great difficulty."

"Oh! I can manage that small distance, for I feel much better this morning."

He in his turn became very pale at this quiet refusal; his lips quivered nervously. He nevertheless replied with the air of an employer, who is interested in the welfare of one of his employés.

"But if I beg you to come? You know the regard I have for you."

Denise did not swerve from the respectful manner she had adopted. "I am greatly gratified, sir, and thank you for your kindness and your invitation. But I repeat, it will be quite impossible, as my brothers are expecting me to-night."

She was determined not to understand. The door was wide open, and she knew that Pauline would look upon her as a fool, and that all the others would laugh at her refusing this invitation. Madame Aurélie, who had gone away, Marguérite, who had called her, the men who were sitting writing, and whose backs she could see, all wished her fall, all manœuvred to throw her into the arms of the master, and at the same time fanned the smouldering passion within herself.

There was a long silence, and then as the noise increased without, Mouret said very quietly:

"When will you come? To-morrow?"

These simple questions troubled Denise very strangely. Her serenity vanished, she stammered:

"I do not know. I cannot."

He smiled and tried to take her hand. She drew it away.

"Are you afraid?"

But she lifted her head, she looked him full in the face, and in her sweet, brave voice said:

"No, I am not afraid. I do only what I wish to do, and I do not wish to accept your invitation, that is all!"

As she ceased speaking an odd noise caused her to look around. She saw that the door was being carefully closed by Inspector Jouve, who had taken it upon himself to do this. It was, in fact, part of his duty to see that the doors were closed.

No one seemed to notice this simple performance of a duty. Clara alone whispered a few words in the ear of Mademoiselle de Fontenailles, who never moved a feature.

Denise, in the meantime, had risen. Mouret said in a low and trembling voice:

"Listen to me. I love you. You have known this for some time, and it is needless to feign a cruel ignorance. You need not fear me. Twenty times at least have I been tempted to call you into my office, but I preferred to speak to you here, where any one may come. I love you, Denise."

She was standing eagerly listening, and still looking him full in the face.

"Tell me, why do you refuse to listen to me? Do you want no aid? Are not your brothers a heavy responsibility? Anything you ask of me for them?"

She stopped him.

"Thanks. I have all I need now."

"But it is liberty I offer you; a life of pleasure and luxury. I will settle a certain amount upon you."

"Thanks. I should find life very wearisome with nothing to do. I have earned my bread since I was ten years old."

He became desperate; she was the first woman who had ever resisted him, they had all obeyed his smallest caprice like submissive servants, and now here was one who said no without even giving a reason. Perhaps he had not said enough. He repeated his offer, doubling it.

"No," she said, without wavering.

Then his heart spoke.

"Can't you see, child," he cried, "that I am perishing for your love?"

A long silence followed. Behind the closed door was heard the softened murmur of the people still at work on the inventory. It was like a murmur of triumph, at this defeat of the master.

He seized her hands.

She did not withdraw them. All her strength seemed to vanish at his touch. How she loved him! How gladly would she have thrown her arms around his neck and laid her weary head on his breast.

"I want you. I will have you!" he repeated. "I shall expect to see you this evening."

His grasp strengthened, and the pain she felt in her wrists gave her courage. She hastily withdrew her hands, and then, head erect and struggling against her weakness, she said quietly:

"No, leave me. I am not a Clara. Then, too, you love a lady who comes here sometimes. Remain with her. I will share no man's heart."

Surprise rendered him motionless. What on earth was she saying, and what did she mean? As a rule these girls whose acquaintance he made thus lightly, were not concerned as to what other women he loved. He was half tempted to laugh, and yet her maidenly dignity was very beautiful.

"Open the door," she said quietly. "I don't like its being shut."

He obeyed, and with throbbing temples and anguish which he could not wholly conceal, he re-called Madame Aurélie, and flew into a passion about the overstock of circulars, which he said must be sold at a reduced price, and got rid of.

This was the rule of the house. Each year everything that was out of style or that had lost its first freshness, was sold at a loss of sixty per cent.

Bourdoucle, who was looking for Mouret, had been detained by Inspector Jouve before the closed door. He was very impatient, but was not bold enough to disturb this *tête-à-tête*.

Was it possible? On such a day, and with such a pale, shadowy little creature!

When Mouret appeared, Bourdoucle spoke of the fancy silks which had accumulated.

This was a great relief to Mouret, who could storm as much as he pleased.

"Of what was Bouthemont thinking?" he said angrily, as he walked away. "Had he not sense

enough as a buyer to feel the pulse of the people before committing himself to such a degree?"

"What is the matter?" murmured Madame Aurélie, greatly disturbed at this scene.

The saleswomen exchanged looks of surprise. It was six o'clock, and the inventory was completed. The sun was shining into the room. Tired families were coming home through the streets, bringing flowers and green branches with them from the country, and dragging weary children by the hand.

After the bustle of the day the *Bonheur* was now strangely quiet. The shelves, boxes and wardrobes were entirely empty. This nudity was the proof of the exactness with which the inventory had been accomplished. The clerks were standing in a sea of merchandize, worth some sixteen million of francs. They hoped to have everything in its place at ten o'clock that night.

As Madame Aurélie returned from dinner she brought back with her the statement of the sum that had been made by the *Bonheur* that year, which the reports from the different Departments had just enabled the managers to give with accuracy. The sum was eighty million francs, ten million more than the previous year. There was but one loss, and that was on the fancy silks.

"If Monsieur Mouret is not satisfied now," said the forewoman, "I can't imagine what he wants. But there he stands at the top of the great stairs, looking like a thunder cloud."

The young ladies went to look at him. He was

alone, and looking down with a moody air at the piles of merchandize.

"Madame," said Denise at this moment, "would you kindly permit me to retire? I can do nothing more, as my foot makes me useless, and I must dine with my uncle to-night."

There was a look of general astonishment. She had not consented then? Madame Aurélie hesitated, seemed on the point of refusing her consent, while Clara shrugged her shoulders. She understood it all now; there was not a word of truth in this story about the letter!

When Pauline heard this last incident in the day's events, she was busy with Deloche, whose mad joy filled her with positive anger; was he so stupid that he liked to see a friend throw away her chances in this way?

And Bourdoucle, who did not dare approach Mouret, wandered about in a state of great uneasiness.

In the meantime, Denise went down the stairs. As she reached the first landing, she came upon a group of salesmen and heard her own name; she knew perfectly well what they were saying. They had not seen her.

"Oh!" said Favier, "she is a vicious little creature full of caprices; she was dead in love with one man, I know."

And he glanced at Hutten, who in his dignity as "the second," held himself a little aloof and did not join in the pleasantries. He was greatly flattered, however, at the respectful manner in which they all turned toward him, and he murmured:

"Oh! she was a great bore!"

Denise, wounded to the heart, stood still, supporting herself by the stair-rail. They saw her and dispersed with stifled laughter. He was right, she was a bore and very stupid, in those days when she had thought so much of him. But how base he was, and how she despised him now! A great trouble had assailed her. Was it not strange that she just now, had had strength enough to repulse a man she adored, when she had been so weak about this miserable fellow, when she only fancied herself in love. Her reason and her courage wavered before these contradictions in her own nature, which she felt herself incapable of reading correctly. She walked as fast as possible across the hall. A subtle instinct induced her to look up just as an inspector opened the door which had been closed since the morning; she saw Mouret. He was still standing at the head of the stairs that overlooked the entire House. But he had forgotten the inventory and all the wealth displayed before him. All had disappeared, yesterday's victories, to-morrow's colossal fortune. With eager eyes he watched Denise, and when she had passed through the door, the whole shop became dark!

CHAPTER X.

BOUTHEMONT was the first to arrive at the house of Madame Desforges, whom he found alone in her Louis XVI. *salon*, to which brasses and bright hangings imparted an air of great gayety. She rose with an air of impatience as he entered, saying:

"Well?"

"Well!" answered the young man, "when I told him that I should drop in to pay my respects to you, he said that he was coming."

"You made him understand that the Baron was to be here?"

"Certainly. That seemed to decide him."

They were speaking of Mouret. The year previous he had taken a great fancy to Bouthemont, and took him about with him a good deal, finally introducing him to Henriette, glad to have some one to enliven a *liaison* of which he was beginning to tire.

It was in this way that the head of the silk room had become the confidant of Mouret and the little widow. He executed commissions for both, talked of one to the other, and settled their little difficulties. Henriette in her paroxysms of jealousy, often said things which amazed him, as he could not understand how she could thus lay aside all her prudence as a woman of the world.

She said, passionately:

"You should have brought him with you. Then I should have been sure of him."

"Zounds!" he cried with his hearty laugh, "it is not my fault if he escapes me sometimes. In fact I don't think he has liked me so well of late, though I feel precisely the same toward him. He is still fond of me, I am sure. If he were not, I should be in a bad way at the *Bonheur*."

The truth was, he felt that in consequence of this last inventory, his position at the *Bonheur des Dames* was decidedly threatened. He had talked a good deal about the rainy season, but he had not been forgiven for the over-stock of fancy silks, all the more because Hutten never ceased to talk of the misfortune. Mouret had condemned him, influenced undoubtedly by his wish to get rid of an inconvenient witness of certain affairs of which he was weary. But in obedience to his usual tactics, he took shelter behind Bourdoucle. "Bourdoucle and the others who were interested," he said, "wished a change made," but he resisted and defended his friend.

"I will wait then," said Madame Desforges, "you know that girl ought to be here at five o'clock. I wish to see them together. In that way I will get at their secret!"

She then went on to say in a feverish, excited way, that she had asked Madame Aurélie to send Denise to her to look at a mantle that fitted badly. When she had the girl in her own room, she would find some excuse for calling Mouret.

Bouthemont, who sat opposite her sofa with his handsome laughing eyes, which he vainly tried to render serious, riveted upon her face, thought that these women of the world could be very hard and very hateful when they chose, and that the shop-girls whose intimacy he had occasionally cultivated, would not have allowed themselves such latitude of speech and such unbounded confidences.

"Come now," he said, "you had best tell me what you propose to do, for I swear to you that there is nothing between them."

"I tell you he loves her!" she cried. "I care little about the others; they are mere incidents; accidents of a day."

She spoke of Clara with disdain. It was said that Mouret, after the refusal of Denise, had turned to Clara, probably to use her as an instrument of vengeance. He had overwhelmed her with presents, and made their intimacy in every way as conspicuous as possible.

The last three months had been with him three months of terrible dissipation; spending money with a prodigality of which every one was talking.

"It is the fault of that creature!" said Henriette. "I know that he is ruining himself with other women merely because she has rejected him. What do I care for his money? I only wish he were poor. You, who are his friend, know how I love him."

She stopped, ready to burst into tears. Hardly knowing what she did, she extended both hands. It was true, she adored Mouret for his youth and his

triumphs. She had never been so thoroughly enslaved in her life, and the thought of losing him was like the sound of her funeral bell tolling. She was forty, and without him what would her life be?

"Oh!" she murmured. "I shall have only the consolation of revenge, if he deserts me now."

Bonthemont still held her hand. She was very beautiful, but she would be very exacting. No, he would be cautious, and would run no risk of complicating his annoyances.

"Why do you not go into business on your own account?" she asked suddenly, as she withdrew her hands.

He was immensely astonished, but after a moment's consideration, said:

"It would require a large capital. Last year I seriously thought of doing so. I am convinced that in Paris there is still a field for new enterprises of that kind. The *Bon Marché* has the left shore; the *Louvre* the centre; we with the *Bonheur* hold the west. There is the north where one could certainly establish oneself. In fact, I have discovered a superb situation behind the Opera House."

"Well?"

He laughed rather loudly.

"I was actually fool enough to speak of it to my father. Yes, I asked him to raise the money at Toulouse."

And he went on to narrate the anger of the old man, who was already embittered by the magnificence of these great Parisian shops, and the contrast they offered to his little shop in the Provinces.

Old Bouthemont, who was fairly choked by the thirty thousand francs gained by his son, swore that he would give his money and that of his friends to a hospital rather than bestow a *centime* on one of these great houses, which were the ruin of modern commerce.

"But you know," concluded the young man, "it was nonsense, for such an enterprise would require millions."

"And suppose millions could be found?" asked Madame Desforges.

He suddenly became very serious. Were not these merely the words of a jealous woman? She did not give him time to question her, but added:

"You know the interest I take in you. We will talk of this another time."

The door-bell rang. She rose and with an instinctive movement pushed her chair back. She waited in expectant silence in this *salon*, with its gay hangings and its profusion of growing plants at the two windows. She stood listening with her eyes on the door.

"It is he," she murmured.

The domestic announced: ,

"Monsieur Mouret, Monsieur de Vallegnose."

Henriette could not restrain an angry gesture. Why did he not come alone? He had gone in search of a friend to avoid a possible *tête-à-tête*. Nevertheless she smiled and extended her hand to the two men.

"How rarely I see you now! I say this to you, Monsieur de Vallegnose, as well as to Monsieur Mouret."

Her great despair was that she was growing stout; she dressed invariably in black to conceal her increasing *embonpoint*, but her graceful head, with its dark hair, retained all its beauty.

Mouret said familiarly as he looked at her:

"It is unnecessary to ask how you are. You look as fresh as a rose."

"I am well, I am happy to say," she replied, "but I might have died, and you would not have known it."

She in her turn looked at him and thought he was ill and worn, his eyelids heavy and his complexion leaden.

"Well," she said, in a tone that she tried to render pleasant. "I cannot return your flattering remarks. You certainly do not look well to-day."

"It is hard work!" said Vallegnose.

Mouret shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply. He had just seen Bouthemont and given him a friendly nod. In the days of their great intimacy he had himself taken Bouthemont away from his Department during the heaviest work of the afternoon. But times had changed, and he now said in a low voice:

"You went off too early. They have found out your absence, and are furious with you."

He was speaking of Bourdoucle and the others as if he himself were not the master.

"Ah!" murmured Bouthemont, uneasily.

"Yes, and I must have a little talk with you. Wait for me and we will go away together."

Henriette was now seated and was listening to Vallegnose, who was telling her that Madame de Boyes

was coming to see her. But she did not take her eyes from Mouret, who sat in silence with his eyes fixed on vacancy. Then when she complained languidly of having no more men at her five o'clock teas, he forgot himself, and said :

"I thought I should find Baron Hartmann here."

Henriette became very pale. She was perfectly well aware that he came now only to meet the Baron, but it was unnecessary to flaunt this indifference in her face. The door opened at this moment, and her servant approached. When she looked up at him, he said in a low voice :

"It is the young person about the mantle, Madame. You bade me inform you when she came."

Henriette, however, did not lower her voice, when she answered the lackey. All her jealousy was expressed in the contemptuous coldness of her words, when she said :

"Let her wait."

"Shall I show her to your dressing-room, Madame?"

"No, let her wait in the ante-chamber."

And when the servant was gone, Henriette resumed her conversation with Vallegnose. Mouret, who had relapsed into his lassitude, had heard this brief interlude but without understanding it; Bouthemont was, however, wide awake to all that was going on. Presently the door was again thrown open, and two ladies appeared.

"Imagine it," said Madame Marly. "I had just driven up to your door when I saw Madame de Boves under the arcades."

"Yes!" explained that lady, "it is such a lovely evening, and the physician wishes me to keep as much as possible in the open air."

Then after a general interchange of hand-shaking, she said to Henriette:

"You have a new maid, I see?"

"No," answered the other, astonished. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I have just seen a young girl in the ante-room."

Henriette interrupted her with a laugh.

"Oh! all these shop-girls look like chambermaids. It is a girl who has come to see about the misfit of a mantle."

Mouret looked at her intently as she spoke, with a vague suspicion of what was going on. She with forced gayety continued to tell how she had purchased this mantle the preceding week, at the *Bonheur des Dames*.

"Indeed!" said Madame Marly. "Then Sauveur dresses you no more? You have left him?"

"By no means, my dear. I only wanted to make an experiment. I was moreover, greatly pleased with a purchase I made there a few weeks before, a travelling cloak. But this time I was not successful. The truth is, these great shops are commonplace. Forgive my plain speaking, Monsieur Mouret. You will never satisfy a woman who is very fastidious in the matter of toilette."

Mouret made no attempt to defend his establishment. He watched her steadily, saying to himse

"No, it was impossible, she would never dare." And it was Bouthemont who lifted up his voice in behalf of the *Bonheur*.

"If all the fashionable women who dress themselves at our establishment were to tell you so, Madame, you would be surprised. If you order, and are measured, for a garment with us, it will be quite as good as one of Sauveur's, and much cheaper, but it is precisely because it is cheaper that it seems to you less good."

"But this mantle of which you speak," said Madame de Boves, "does not fit you, it seems. I remember the girl now. It is somewhat dark in your anteroom, and at first I did not recognize her."

"And I wondered," added Madame Marly, "where I had seen her. But pray do not let us detain you."

Henriette shrugged her shoulders, with careless indifference.

"Oh! it does not matter. There is no haste."

The ladies continued their discussion on the style and cut of the garments from these large establishments. Then Madame de Boves spoke of her husband, who had gone, she said, on a tour of inspection to Saint-Lô, and Henriette mentioned that the illness of an aunt had summoned Madame Guibal to Franche Comté—nor could she expect Madame Bourdelais that day, as she being an excellent manager, always shut herself up the last of the month with a sewing woman to examine her children's clothing and see that everything was in order.

Madame Marly was very uneasy. The position of her husband at the Lycée Bonaparte was in serious

peril, in consequence of lessons he had given outside in second-rate institutions. He earned all the money he could to supply the ever increasing demands of his household, and she, one evening, seeing his excessive depression, had conceived the idea of employing her friend Henriette as mediator with the Minister of Public Instruction. Henriette silenced and tranquilized her with a word.

"You look ill, Monsieur Mouret," said Madame de Boves.

"Hard work!" repeated Vallegnose, with his sarcastic smile.

Mouret rose hastily, as if ashamed of his absorption. He took his place in the circle of ladies, and immediately became himself again.

"He had been very much occupied," he said, "with all his winter orders coming in." He spoke of a superb display of laces; and Madame de Boves questioned him about the price of Alençon; she wanted to buy some, she said. She wore a mantle that was out of date, and coveted every handsome wrap she saw, without the smallest hope of ever satisfying her passion.

"Baron Hartmann," announced the lackey.

Henriette noticed the cordial grasp of the hand with which Mouret met the Baron, who bowed low to the ladies, and smiled upon the young man.

Then as an *habitué* of the house, he ventured to say:

"There is a very pretty girl in the ante-chamber; who may she be?"

"Nobody—nobody at all," answered Madame De

forges, in her constrained voice. "Only a girl from one of the shops."

The door stood open, the lackey was serving the tea. He went out and came in, placed the china tea service on the table, and then the plates of sandwiches and biscuit. The *salon* was filled with light, softened by the plants in the windows, and each time the door was opened, the dark corner of the anteroom was visible, which was lighted only by panes of ground glass. There stood the motionless, patient figure of Denise. There was a leather-covered bench in the room, but Denise was too proud to seat herself there. She felt that she was being insulted. For a half hour she had been waiting without receiving any message from the lady. She had been stared at with curiosity by the Baron, and the other guests, as they passed her. She suddenly perceived Mouret, and at once knew what was intended. He, too, did the same.

"Is that one of your saleswomen?" asked the Baron, with his usual good-natured air.

Mouret, with difficulty, concealed his emotion.

"I presume so," he answered, "but I do not know which."

"It is the little blonde in the cloak room," said Madame Marly, wishing to be obliging. "She is next to Madame Aurélie, I believe."

Henriette was watching him.

"Ah!" he said quietly.

And he tried to talk of the *fêtes* given to the King of Prussia, but the Baron took a malicious pleasure in talking of the saleswomen in these grand establish-

ments. He pretended that he was desirous of information, and asked a series of questions. Whence came they, as a rule? From the country, or from Paris itself? and were their morals as bad as was said?

Then followed a long discussion.

"You really consider them a virtuous class, then?" asked the Baron.

Mouret defended the virtue of these shop girls so energetically, that Vallegnose was immensely amused.

Then Bouthemont came to the assistance of his *chef*.

"Of course," he said, "there were some of all kinds among them—adventuresses and good honest girls. Formerly, only poor uneducated girls became saleswomen, while now there were absolutely families—in the Rue de Sèvres for example—who were bringing up their daughters for the *Bon Marché*. In fact, if they chose to behave themselves they could do so, for they lived a sheltered life, and unlike the grisettes, had a table and bed provided for them in a respectable place. Their lives were not easy ones, certainly, but they were comparatively safe. The great trouble was that their position was ill-defined. They were accustomed to a certain amount of luxury—were often insufficiently educated, and yet by association with people above them socially, became imbued with tastes far above their condition. They formed a class quite by themselves. Their misfortunes and their vices arose from this fact—"

"And I must say," interrupted Madame de Boves, "that I know no creatures in the world half so disagreeable."

And these ladies then began to narrate their various experiences.

The truth was that a bitter jealousy existed between the saleswomen and their well-dressed customers, the ladies whom they involuntarily copied in manners and dress, and a still keener jealousy was felt by the poorly-dressed customers and the little *bourgeoises*, toward these girls dressed in silk, from whom they expected the obsequiousness of a servant, in return for the smallest purchase.

"The truth is," said Henriette, in conclusion, "all these creatures are for sale, like their merchandize."

Mouret had strength to smile. The Baron was watching him, and was quite charmed with his self-control. Then the conversation wandered off to the *fêtes* to be given to the King of Prussia—they would certainly be very superb, and Parisian commerce would profit by it.

Henriette said very little; she seemed to be very thoughtful; she was divided between the desire to keep Denise waiting still longer in the ante-room and the fear that Mouret, now duly warned, would go away. Finally she rose from her chair.

"You will excuse me a few minutes," she said to Madame Marly.

"Most assuredly," that lady answered. "I will do the honors while you are away."

She rose in her turn and began to pour out the tea. Henriette went toward the Baron.

"You will stay a little longer?" she said.

"Oh! yes, I want to talk with Monsieur Mouret."

We will, with your permission, invade your small *salon*."

Henriette then left the room, and her silken train swept after with a soft rustle like that made by an adder as it glides through the underbrush.

The Baron immediately led Mouret away, leaving the ladies to Bouthemont and Vallegnose. They stood near the window of the small *salon*, talking under their breath of a new project. For some time Mouret had been cherishing the dream of realizing his former project, of seeing the *Bonheur* cover the entire land comprised between the *Rue Monsigny* to the *Rue de la Michodière* and the *Rue Neuve Saint-Augustin* to the *Rue du Dix-Decembre*. But as yet there was a very large portion of this district that he could not obtain, and this was a sting that marred all his joy. So long as his principal entrance was on the *Rue Saint-Augustin*, a dark street of old Paris, his work was imperfect and unfinished. He wished to become a part and parcel of new Paris, and face on one of the new avenues. He saw the colossal *Bonheur des Dames* throwing a larger shadow than that of the *Louvre*. But he was continually arrested in his project by the *Credit Immobilier*, which adhered to the original plan of building an addition to the Grand Hôtel; the plans were all ready and they were only waiting for the rubbish to be cleared away from the *Rue du Dix-Decembre* to begin the work. Mouret was making one last effort to convince Baron Hartmann.

"I want to tell you," began the Baron, "that we had a meeting yesterday, and I came here thinking to

find you, that I might tell you what they say. They still resist."

The young man made a little nervous gesture.

"What do they say?" he asked.

"They say just what I myself have told you, and what I still am more than half inclined to believe. Your façade is but an ornament, and to carry out your plans would simply be throwing away enormous sums of money."

This was too much for Mouret.

"Can't you see," he cried, "that in two years you would get your money back? What does it matter to you what is done with this land, so long as it brings you in an enormous rate of interest? You would see that crowds would pour in and out of a new entrance on a street where five or six carriages could roll past at their ease."

"Yes," answered the Baron, laughing, "I see all that. You are a poet after your own light. These gentlemen consider that there would be danger to you in increasing your business. They are more prudent in your behalf than you are yourself."

"Prudent! I don't understand the word! Can't you see the figures, and don't they speak for themselves? Don't they show the constant increase of our trade? At first with a capital of five hundred thousand francs, I made one million. This capital was rolled over four times and it became four million, then it was turned over ten times and has produced forty million. I am now prepared to state, since our last inventory, that we have eighty million."

He raised his voice, and struck the fingers of his right hand on the palm of his left, as he spoke.

The Baron interrupted him.

"I know, I know. But you can't hope to go on this way!"

"And why not?" asked Mouret. "What should stop us? The only question is how many times can we turn our money over."

"The truth is, you will end by drinking the money of Paris as you would a glass of water?"

"Precisely. Does not Paris belong to women and do not women belong to us?"

The Baron laid his hands on Mouret's shoulders and looked at him with a paternal air.

"You are a clever fellow," he said, "and I like you. I will try once more to make them hear reason. I am inclined to think that it would be better to put more money into your machine than to risk this addition to the Grand Hôtel, which to my mind is a hazardous operation."

Mouret's excitement had suddenly abated. He thanked the Baron, but without his usual enthusiasm, and his eyes turned toward the door of the ante-room with a certain restless anxiety. Vallegnose, seeing that they were no longer talking business, now approached.

He heard the Baron say:

"I believe they will avenge themselves."

"Whom do you mean?" asked Mouret, in some embarrassment.

"The women, of course. They are weary of you, and you of them, just now."

He was referring to the rumors that had reached his ears of the recent follies of the young man.

"I really do not understand you," said Mouret.

"Never mind then!" answered the Baron, "but I must give you one word of warning. Look out for women, they are not to be trusted, they spend your money and deceive you."

He laughed and Vallegnose followed his example.

Mouret said, "What is the use of money if you cannot spend it?"

"There I agree with you," the Baron replied. "Amuse yourself, my dear fellow. I do not propose to teach you morality, nor do I tremble for the interests we have confided to your care; it is not altogether disagreeable to be ruined, when one is enough of a man to reconstruct his fortunes. But there are other losses beside that of money—other suffering—"

He checked himself, and his smile became very sad. He had watched the duel between Henriette and Mouret, amazed that any one had the energy for such battles. He felt that the crisis was now near at hand, and he divined the drama when he saw Denise in the ante-room.

"Oh! as to suffering, that is not in my programme," said Mouret in a tone of bravado.

The Baron did not speak for some minutes and then he replied, slowly:

"Don't make yourself out worse than you are. Money is not everything, my friend. Your heart counts for something."

Just at this moment, the door of the chamber opened; Mouret, who was about to speak, started. The three men turned. It was Madame Desforges, who putting in her head called gaily, and as if in great haste:

"Monsieur Mouret! Monsieur Mouret!"

When she saw them, she added:

"Oh! will you let me have Monsieur Mouret for a minute? He must come, for he has sold me a terrible mantle. This girl is an idiot, without an idea in her head. Wont you come here a moment?"

Mouret hesitated, recoiling before the scene of which his instinct advised him. But he was compelled to obey, for the Baron said in his most paternal tone:

"Go, my dear fellow, Madame requires your assistance."

Then Mouret obeyed, and as the door closed behind him, he fancied he heard a stifled laugh from Vallegnose. Then, too, he could bear no more. Ever since Henriette had left the room and he knew that Denise was in her jealous presence, he felt an ever increasing anxiety, a nervous dread that impelled him from time to time to hold his breath to listen, and his heart swelled with compassionate tenderness for this young girl; he longed to sustain and comfort her.

He had never before loved in this way. He was a very busy man, and Henriette, charming as she undeniably was, and flattering as was her intimacy, was but an agreeable pastime, and lately he had begun to look upon her as merely a useful friend. His heart now throbbed with anguish and he could not sleep by night nor eat by day, for the haunting thought of Der

Even at this moment he longed to be at her side, to protect her from some painful scene.

They crossed the sleeping-room, now silent and empty. Then Madame Desforges opened a door and passed into a dressing-room. It was a good sized room, hung with red silk, and furnished with a marble dressing table and a wardrobe with long mirrors in it. As the windows looked out on the court-yard, it was very dark and the gas had been lighted on either side of the wardrobe. When Mouret entered he saw Denise standing just within this circle of light. She was very pale and wore a tight fitting coat of black cashmere and a simple black hat. When she saw the young man she began to tremble.

"I want Monsieur Mouret to see and judge for himself," said Henriette. "Mademoiselle, please give me some assistance." Denise approached and placed the mantle over the lady's shoulders. Henriette turned and examined herself in the mirror.

"Well!" she said, "what do you think of it? Do you admit that it is a misfit?"

"I do indeed, Madame," answered Mouret, to put an end to the discussion. "But Mademoiselle will take your measure, and we will make you another."

"No, that won't do," answered Henriette hastily. "I require it at once. This is too tight about the bust and sticks out here at the back of the neck."

Then in an imperative tone, she said:

"Looking at it, Mademoiselle, won't correct the fault; try and do something if you please. It is your business, not mine."

Denise without a word, began to put in some more pins. This went on for some time; she was obliged to go from one shoulder to the other, and even once found it necessary to kneel to pull the fronts of the mantle together. Madame Desforges looked down upon her all the time with the hard discontented face of a mistress difficult to please. Delighted that she was able to compel this girl to perform these almost menial tasks, she continued to give brief directions, occasionally glancing at Mouret to detect any change of expression in his countenance.

"Put a pin in there,—no, not there, here in the sleeve. You do not understand, I see, and now that spoils the set of the pocket. Take care, you are pricking me!"

Twice Mouret made vain attempts to interfere and bring this scene to a close. His heart throbbed painfully, and he loved Denise more than ever for the dignified silence she maintained. If the young girl's hands trembled a little, at being treated in this way in his presence, she accepted the necessities of the position with the proud resignation of a courageous nature. When Madame Desforges realized that she was gaining nothing, and she found she could not draw them into a self-betrayal, she tried another line of conduct, and smiled tenderly on Mouret, treating him openly as a favored lover. Pins were required:

"In that ivory box on the dressing-table, dear, if you will be so kind—empty, is it? Be so good as to look on the mantel—behind the mirror, you know

When he brought the pins, she compelled him to g

them to her, one by one, looked at him, and spoke to him as if Denise had not been present.

"I don't think I am hump-backed, am I, Mouret?"

Denise looked up; she was very pale, but she went on putting in the pins in silence. Mouret's eyes were fixed on her heavy band of blonde hair, and her delicate throat; he could no longer see her face, but he imagined the look of shame and distress upon it. He knew now that she would never listen to him after this woman had made such a parade of their *liaison*. For the first time in his life he felt a brutal longing to strike a woman. How could he compel her to silence? How could he tell Denise that he adored her and only her, and that for her he was ready to sacrifice every one else? He stepped back a little and said, coldly:

"It is not worth while, Madame, to waste time in this way. I frankly admit that this wrap does not fit you, and cannot be made to fit you."

A long silence followed; one of the gas burners began to whistle. The mirrors in the wardrobe reflected the red silk hangings, and the forms of the two women. A flask of Verbena water standing open on the dressing-table gave forth the faded fragrance of a withered bouquet.

"This, Madame, is all that I can do," said Denise, rising.

She felt that she was at the end of her strength. Twice, half blind and dizzy, she had pushed the pins into her fingers instead of into the material. Was he in the plot? Did he intend to avenge himself for her refusal, by showing her that other women loved him if

she did not? This bitter thought chilled the blood in her veins, and she felt that never in her life, not even in those terrible days of poverty and loneliness, had she needed so much courage as now. It was not so much that she was humiliated, as that the fact of his loving another was made so apparent to her.

Henriette was examining herself in the mirror, and suddenly broke forth harshly:

"Is this a jest, Mademoiselle? It fits worse than before! Look how it strains across the bust!"

Then Denise made an unfortunate remark; the truth was she could no longer restrain herself:

"You are a trifle stout; we cannot prevent that, you know."

"Stout! stout, did you say, Mademoiselle?" and Henriette turned very pale, in her turn. "It strikes me, Mademoiselle, that you are becoming a little insolent."

They stood looking at each other, both trembling with emotion. There was no question now of a difference in social position. They were but women equals in their rivalry. One had torn off the mantle and tossed it on a chair, while the other placed on the table with a nervous motion, the few pins still in her fingers.

"I am astonished," said Henriette, "that Monsieur Mouret tolerates such insolence! I thought sir, that you were very fastidious in regard to the people you employed."

Denise had regained her usual serenity. She replied quietly:

"If Monsieur Mouret retains me in his service, it

because he has nothing to complain of in my conduct. I am ready to apologize to you if he exacts it."

Mouret listened, distressed at this quarrel, but unable to find any words with which to end it. He had the greatest horror of these feminine altercations, which were painful to his ideas of good taste. Henriette endeavored to make him say something which should be condemnatory of the young girl; but as he remained absolutely silent, she was induced to utter one last insult:

"Very good, sir; it seems that I am to be made to suffer under my very roof from the impertinences of your slaves,—a girl picked up in a gutter!"

Tears gathered in the eyes of Denise; she had kept them back as long as possible, but this last insult was unendurable. When Mouret saw that she was weeping, he no longer hesitated, his whole heart went out toward her in one great burst of tenderness. He took her hands as he said:

"Go, my child, and forget that you ever came to this house."

Henriette, choking with mingled rage and despair, watched them angrily.

"Wait a moment," he added, folding the mantle himself. "Take this with you, Madame will buy another in its place; and, do not weep, I beg of you; you know how highly I respect you."

He accompanied her to the door which he closed after her. Denise had not spoken; only a soft flush came to her cheeks, and her eyes filled again with tears, but these were delicious tears.

Henriette stood with her handkerchief pressed against her lips. All her calculations had been grievously upset, and she herself was caught in a net that she had spread for another. She was in despair that her jealousy had led her so far. To be deserted for a creature like that! Her pride suffered as much as her love.

"Then this is the girl whom you love?" she said, with panting breath.

Mouret did not reply at once; he took two or three turns around the room as if struggling with his emotion. Then he stopped short, and said courteously, and in a voice that he endeavored to render steady, the simple words:

"Yes, Madame, you are right."

The gas burner continued to whistle in the close air of this dressing-room. The mirrors no longer reflected the red hangings; the room looked cold and sad. Henriette threw herself into a deep chair, twisting her handkerchief in her feverish fingers, repeating amid her sobs: "Ah! Heavens! how miserable I am!"

He stood looking at her in silence for some minutes. Then he quietly turned on his heel and departed. She, left alone, wept bitterly. When Mouret returned to the small salon he found no one but Vallegnose there, the Baron had returned to the ladies. The young man still greatly disturbed by the scene he had passed through, seated himself in a quiet corner without speaking. His friend watched him for some minutes, and seemed to be almost amused by Mouret's evident trouble. Finally he said:

"Are you very happy nowadays?"

Mouret did not at once understand him. But at last remembering their former conversation on the stupidity and uselessness of life, answered:

"Yes. I am happy because I live. Ah! my dear fellow, do not laugh, the hours are few that one passes in agony."

He dropped his voice, and with an attempt at gayety continued:

"Yes. You have guessed the truth. Between them they have managed to torture me past endurance. But still I do not find life dull or wearisome. This girl, who says no to me to-day, shall still be mine!"

Vallegnose said quietly: "And then?"

"And then? She will be mine, and that is all I ask. You think yourself strong because you refuse to suffer. Nevertheless, this does not prevent you from being duped. Consent, with a good grace, to being deceived, and you will be all the happier."

Vallegnose shook his head. What was the use of working, since money did not purchase everything. He, were he in Mouret's place, would close his shop and take to his bed, the day he realized that his millions would not buy the woman he adored.

Mouret became very grave, as he listened, but finally burst forth, declaring that he believed in the power of his will.

"I want her—she shall be mine! And if she escapes me, you will see what I will do to enable me to forget her. Action is a recompense in itself. To act, to create, to fight against stubborn facts, to conquer them

or be conquered by them, makes the joy and the health of human life!"

"A very simple recipe, after all," murmured the other. "You mean that you exhaust and stun yourself, that is all."

"Well, I prefer to be stunned and exhausted rather than to be simply bored to death!"

Both men now laughed, for they recalled their old college discussions.

Vallegnose, in his usual low, gentle voice, now launched forth on a small lecture in regard to the platitude of everything. Yes, he was bored to death all day long. He worked this year, as he had the last, for three thousand francs, but was promised an augmentation of six hundred—this salary did not much more than pay for his cigars. But it was really too much trouble to make a change.

Mouret made some allusion in reply, to his marriage to Mademoiselle de Boves, and Vallegnose replied that in spite of the aunt's persistency in living, the marriage would take place before long. As for himself, he really did not care. What was the use of caring? nothing ever turned out as he wished. Then he spoke of his future father-in-law. Madame de Guibal, he said, was spending his money, and leading him a devil of a dance.

"He is happier than you, at all events," said Mouret, rising.

"I dare say," answered Vallegnose, with a half yawn. "I have about come to the conclusion that only bad things are amusing!"

Mouret wished to leave, but did not care to have his departure assume the air of a flight. He therefore went back to the *salon* and asked for a cup for tea.

Baron Hartmann at once greeted him with the question:

"Does the mantle fit?"

Mouret answered that he was ashamed to say it did not, and he had washed his hands of it.

There was a general exclamation at this. Madame Marly hastened to pour out a cup of tea for him, while Madame de Boves declared that ready-made garments never did fit; that they were always too narrow across the bust.

Mouret seated himself by Bouthemont's side, who had not moved for an hour—as he was resolved to learn his fate that night, and to know if he were to be dismissed or not from the *Bonheur*. Mouret informed him, very abruptly, that it had been decided by the other members of the council to part with his services, and took a sip of tea, while protesting that he himself was in despair.

"The truth is," Mouret continued, "I came near having an open quarrel with them and was obliged to leave the room. But after all, what can I do? I can't stand alone against these gentlemen, nor quarrel with them on a point like this."

Bouthemont, who was very pale, now forced himself to express his thanks.

"Where on earth is Henriette!" exclaimed Madame Marly. "Who ever heard of a mantle like this before?"

This prolonged absence had become, in fact, quite embarrassing to the little circle which had been deserted. But at this moment Madame Desforges appeared.

"You wash your hands of it too, then?" cried Madame de Boves, gaily.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Monsieur Mouret has just said that you could do nothing with your mantle."

"Monsieur Mouret was jesting. The mantle will do perfectly well," answered Henriette, with great apparent surprise.

She was very calm and smiling. She had been bathing her eyes, probably, for they were not in the least red. Although her heart ached nearly to bursting, she had strength to hide her torture under her usual air of charming social grace. It was with her usual gay laugh that she offered sandwiches to Vallegnose. The Baron alone, who knew her well, noticed the compression of her lips and the sombre fire in her eyes. He guessed all that had taken place.

"Every one to her taste!" said Madame de Boves, as she took a sandwich. "I know women who would not buy so much as a ribbon except at the *Louvre*, others feel just the same about the *Bon Marché*."

"The *Bon Marché* is extremely provincial," murmured Madame Marly, "and there is always such a crowd at the *Louvre*."

The ladies had entered on a discussion about the great shops. Mouret was called upon to give his opinion, which he did, with a great air of trying to be just. The *Bon Marché* was an excellent establishment, solid

and respectable, but the people who frequented the *Louvre* were certainly more brilliant.

"But as for yourself," said the Baron, laughing. "You prefer the *Bonheur des Dames*."

"Yes," answered Mouret, quietly, "I certainly do, and we are very fond of our customers."

All the women laughed, for he had announced a great truth. Women at the *Bonheur* felt that they were in an atmosphere redolent of flattery, an adoration which even the best of them enjoyed. The enormous success of the establishment was due to this consciousness.

"By the way," said Henriette, who wished to show that she was perfectly at ease, "what are you doing with my *protégée*, Monsieur Mouret? I mean Mademoiselle de Fontenailles," and turning toward Madame Marly, she added:

"A poor girl, who is in reality a Marquise, but left without a sou."

"At present," answered Mouret, "she makes three francs per day, and I intend to marry her to one of my clerks."

"Horrors!" cried Madame de Boves.

He looked at her a moment, and then said in his calm voice:

"And why not, Madame? Is it not better for her to marry an honest fellow, even if he be a clerk, than to run the risk of meeting a lazy scoundrel on the street?"

Vallegnose now spoke, by way of averting a collision.

"Don't let him talk, Madame. He will tell you that all the old families in France ought to sell calicoes."

"I am quite willing to maintain," answered Mouret, "that for many of them it would be a most honorable climax."

There was a laugh at this, but some of the persons present were none too well pleased. He continued to praise what he called the aristocracy of labor. A bright color rose to the cheeks of Madame de Boves, whose poverty compelled her to resort to most mortifying expedients, but Madame Marly, on the contrary, greatly approved of what was said, as she thought of her poor husband, who at that moment entered the room. When he had thanked Madame Desforges for her application in his behalf to the Minister, he glanced at Mouret in the timid fashion of a man who is brought face to face with the evil he most dreaded. He was startled therefore when Mouret appealing to him, said:

"Is it not so, sir, does not work lead to success?"

"Work and economy," answered the professor with a little shiver. "You must not forget economy, sir."

Bouthemont all this time was sitting quite still. Mouret's words were ringing in his ears. He rose at last and going to Henriette, said in a very low voice:

"He has dismissed me, but if it is in my power, he shall repent. You will hear of me near the Opera."

She looked up at him with a strange flash in her eyes.

"You may rely on my assistance," she said, "but wait a moment."

She beckoned Baron Hartmann into the recess

window. Without the smallest circumlocution she recommended Bouthemont to him; spoke of him as a man who would in his turn revolutionize Paris, and who meant to establish himself on his own account. When she spoke of giving some assistance to her new *protégé*, the Baron could not restrain a gesture of terror. This was the fourth friend she had recommended to him, and the Baron felt that his position was becoming ridiculous. But he did not refuse positively; in fact his fancy was pleased by the idea of another *Bonheur des Dames*, for this was not the first time that he had lent his assistance to rival enterprises. He promised to look into the matter.

"We must have a little talk to-night," said Henriette in Bouthemont's ear. "Come in at nine o'clock. I will keep the Baron."

The *salon* was quite gay at this moment. Mouret had regained his usual cheerfulness, and the Baron was listening to him with great admiration. The duel was over then. Henriette lay on the ground sorely wounded, but she was not the woman to whom Mouret would bow the knee, and the Baron thought of the fragile girl he had seen in the ante-room. She was the one after all.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was on the 25th of September that work began on the new façade of the *Bonheur des Dames*. Baron Hartmann, according to his promise, had pushed the affair through at the last meeting of the *Credit Immobilier*, and Mouret was very near the realization of his dream. This façade on the Rue du Dix-Décembre was like the blossoming of his pet project. He wished to make a *fête* of the laying down of the first stone. He distributed presents to his salesmen, and gave them game and champagne at dinner. His good humor was very noticeable, and the air of triumph with which he used his trowel and mortar was very remarkable.

For weeks he had been restless and nervous, but this day he was once more like himself. But after dinner his good spirits vanished; he seemed feverish and his smiles were forced. The next day Clara wished to be disagreeable to Denise. She had noticed Colomban's admiration for herself and she took it into her head to laugh at the Baudus.

As Marguérite was cutting her pencil she said in a very audible voice:

"You know my admirer opposite. He will end by making trouble for me in that dark shop which no one ever enters."

"But you know he is to marry the daughter of the proprietor."

"Is that so? Then it would be a capital joke to carry him off before her very face and eyes," answered Clara.

She went on talking in this vein, rejoicing to see the indignant color mount to the face of Denise. The young girl forgave all insults offered to herself, but the thought of her cousin Geneviève dying from the deliberate cruelty of this worthless woman was more than she could bear.

A customer appeared, and as Madame Aurélie was just called away, Denise said to Clara:

"Mademoiselle, you had better attend to this lady rather than waste your time talking."

"I am not talking."

"Don't answer me, I beg. Attend to this lady."

Clara was conquered, she could only obey. When Denise exercised her authority it was quietly and without raising her voice, and no one thought of rebellion. Her very gentleness had won her great influence.

Marguérite went on cutting her pencil; she was the only person in the room who approved of the persistent resistance offered by Denise to Mouret. She never admitted her own past misconduct, but with a sad shake of her head, said that if a girl only realized what she brought on herself by levity she would see how much better it would be to behave herself.

"You are angry?" said a voice just behind Denise.

It was Pauline; she had heard and seen what had taken place, and now spoke in a low voice, with a smile.

"And I have a right to be," answered Denise. "I do not choose that such insubordination shall exist in this room."

"Of which you may be queen, as soon as you say the word."

Pauline did not altogether comprehend the motives of her friend's conduct. She had married Baugh in August, "a great piece of nonsense," as she said gaily. The terrible Bourdoucle treated her now as of no account. She was in constant dread that he would bid her and her husband go and love each other elsewhere, for matrimony was not approved of in the *Bonheur des Dames*. Consequently when she happened to meet Baugh in the galleries she pretended not to know him, but she had just had a great fright. Inspector Jouve had caught her talking with her husband behind a great bale of goods.

"And he is always watching me," she added to Denise, as she concluded her story.

Jouve in fact now appeared, but when he saw Denise he bowed respectfully and passed on.

"I know he meant to threaten me if you had not been here," said Pauline. "Tell me, if I get into trouble will you use your influence in my behalf? Don't look so amazed, you know perfectly well that you can do what you choose in the *Bonheur*."

So saying, she hurried back to her duties. Denise colored and was greatly annoyed at these friendly allusions, and at the constant flattery she received.

When Madame Aurélie returned and found the room

quiet and orderly, under the control of "the second," she gave her a friendly smile.

Bourdoucle was the only person who was not disarmed; he had taken an intense dislike to Denise in the very beginning. He detested her for her very sweetness, and struggled against her on account of the influence she exercised over Mouret, which influence he felt would sooner or later, imperil the safety of the house. The commercial ability of Mouret seemed to him to have become blunted since he had fallen in love with this woman. Bourdoucle had a superstitious feeling that the wealth that came from women would vanish through this one.

No woman, however fair, had ever moved him, he was totally without passion, and this constant intercourse with them at the *Bonheur* wearied him beyond endurance. He did not believe in the honesty and purity of Denise nor in the frankness of her refusal. In his opinion she was playing a part, and playing it most skilfully, for had she yielded at once, Mouret would have forgotten her by this time, but her resistance had made him her slave.

A woman of experience could not have managed better than this girl. Consequently Bourdoucle never met her and looked into her sweet and gentle face, without a feeling of positive fear. How was he to frustrate her plans, and expose her hypocrisy?

His only hope was that he might penetrate her artifices and discover something which would cause her dismissal from the *Bonheur*.

"Watch her well, Jouve," said Bourdoucle over

and over again, to the inspector, "I will reward you."

But Jouve knew what he was about, and had a very shrewd suspicion that he had best take the side of this girl, who he did not doubt would reign over them all some day. He thought her adorably pretty. His Colonel in other days had killed himself for just such a little creature with as insignificant a face, but a face nevertheless which won every heart.

"I am watching," he answered, "but upon my word I have discovered nothing."

All sorts of stories were in circulation, in spite of the superficial homage and respect shown to Denise. The entire House believed that Hutten had been her lover and some declared that he was still; Deloche was another, they were constantly seen talking together.

"Then you have found out nothing about the young man in the lace room?" asked Bourdoucle.

"No sir, nothing as yet," answered the inspector.

It was with Deloche that Bourdoucle hoped to criminate Denise, and he himself had seen them laughing one morning together in the basement. In the meantime he was very respectful to her. He no longer disdained her, and felt that his ten years of service would count as nothing if they came into opposition.

"Keep your eyes on that Deloche," he repeated to the inspector, "they are perpetually together. If you find out anything, let me know, and I will attend to the rest!"

Mouret all this time was in a state of perpetual anguish. This child tortured him almost beyond e

duration. He thought of her as she entered the *Bonheur*, with her stout leather shoes, her scanty black dress and her half frightened air. Everybody laughed at her, and he himself had thought her ugly, and now he would have gone on his knees to win one look. For months she had been merely a curiosity in his eyes, he amused himself at her inexperience without the smallest idea that she was slowly winning his heart. Perhaps he had loved her at the very first moment, who could tell? He remembered that evening when they walked together under the chestnut trees in the Tuileries. He heard again the laughing voices of the children and the splash and drip of a distant fountain as she walked by his side in silence, and now he loved her, loved her with every fibre of his being, and she was such a child! How was it possible? The light breeze made by her robe as she passed, seemed so strong that he could not stand up against it.

He had struggled for weeks and months, and even now he was at times indignant at his folly. What had she done to attract him? Nothing. She was not one of those imposing creatures of marvellous beauty that take men's hearts by storm; no, she was a gentle little being without any astonishing amount of intelligence, and he smiled at the thought of her *début* as a saleswoman at the *Bonheur*.

After every one of these angry struggles he was incensed and ashamed as if he had insulted his idol. She had all that he most admired in a woman, courage, gayety, simplicity, and her gentleness exercised a wonderful control over him. He

thought of her smile, the radiance of her face, the dewy freshness of her blue eyes, the laughing dimples in her cheeks, and of the golden beauty of her blonde tresses. He admitted frankly to himself that he was conquered, as much by her rare intelligence as by her beauty. The other saleswomen had assumed a little exterior polish, while she retained all her natural grace and the savor of her origin. The most practical ideas were in that graceful brow, whose outlines denoted a strong will and a love of order. And he was ready to implore her pardon for the blasphemies he had uttered in his hours of revolt.

Why had she refused to listen to him? Over and over again he had besought her. He told her that he was willing to gratify her ambition and make her forewoman whenever there was a vacancy, and yet she refused to listen to him. He could not understand it. Of course the girl would yield at last; of this he was sure, for he had but a low opinion of a woman's virtue, and at this thought the veins of his forehead swelled to bursting.

He dreamed of Denise all night. Her image followed him to his desk, where he sat signing letters and checks from nine to ten o'clock; a work that he accomplished mechanically. At ten o'clock the twelve most interested members of the Council met, and at this meeting he was obliged to preside. All questions of the daily routine of the *Bonheur* were now discussed, and above all rose the voice of this woman, who exercised this strange fascination over him. He saw her radiant smile in the most critical moment of some financial combination.

After this meeting was over, Denise in spirit, accompanied him through the House, and in the afternoon from two to four lingered near his chair while he received a crowd of manufacturers from all parts of France, bankers and inventors, a continual going and coming of wealth and intelligence.

If he forgot her for one brief minute while deciding on the ruin or prosperity of some particular branch of industry, he turned toward her again with a start, his voice became suddenly hushed as he asked himself of what good was this mad pursuit of wealth since she would accept none of it at his hands.

It was during his daily inspection of the *Bonheur des Dames* that he felt his misery most acutely. To have built this gigantic machine and then cease to care for it because a little girl would not listen to him! He had a thorough contempt for himself when he thought of it.

In the basement as he stood before the slide that brought down the packages from above, in a great river, when he heard the van rattle away from the door, and realized that he held in his hands the fates of some of the greatest manufacturers in France, he remembered that he could not buy a kiss from one of the little saleswomen in his employment.

He stopped to watch great boxes and bales unpacked, and remembered that he had offered silks and velvets to this young girl and that she had refused them.

He walked to the other end of the basement, and beheld long corridors stretching away, all lighted by

gas, all filled with "reserved stock." Then he stood and looked at the tables now covered with bundles and boxes, which twenty men were dividing and placing in compartments, of which each bore the name of a *quartier* in Paris. There was much of the uproar attendant on the departure of a steamer, and Mouret felt a gentle interest in seeing this branch of the service, but all the time he was feeling that he would leave everything if she persisted in saying no.

He went up-stairs, trying to shake off this persistent thought, and stopped at the Department where foreign orders were filled. This Department was increasing in importance and required at present some two hundred employés, some of whom opened, read and classified the letters that came from the provinces and foreign lands, while others packed into boxes the merchandise ordered by these correspondents. And the number of letters was increasing so rapidly that no one now took the trouble to count them; they were weighed and amounted to one hundred pounds daily, and this was on the increase. This ought to have delighted him, but he remained unmoved, and wandered about with but one fixed idea, that in spite of the brilliant success, of which the proofs were so apparent, he was utterly powerless, for she said no—always no.

He went to the desks where the bills were made out and found twenty-five clerks at work.

He went to another room, where the accounts were kept of the percentage due the salesmen, and a sense of the uselessness of all this money—of the folly of

all this trouble, pressed heavily upon him, for she said no, always no.

This no; like thunder, filled his ears and echoed through every Department he entered. He went up-stairs and stood on the bridges, prolonging his examination, and making it distressingly minute. The House had grown enormously—he had a magnificent future before him, but it was no, always no.

The people he employed would make a little town. He had fifteen hundred salesmen, a thousand more employés, of whom forty were inspectors and seventy cashiers. In the kitchen, alone, thirty-two men were employed, three hundred and fifty boys in the shop, wearing livery, and in the stables—the almost royal stables on the *Rue Monsigny*, opposite the *Bonheur*, there were one hundred and forty-five horses. The four wagons, which had been the original number, had grown to sixty-two—and these dashed all over Paris, driven by coachmen stiff and erect, who wore the colors of the *Bonheur des Dames*.

These wagons were seen beyond Paris, as far as the Forest of Saint Germain, where the burnished panels glittered through the drooping branches of the old trees.

Mouret indulged a dream of some day seeing these wagons rolling on every highway in France—from one frontier to the other. But he never went now to look at his horses, of which he had been so proud and so fond. Of what good was this conquest of the world, since it was no, always no. He continued to look every night at the day's receipts, inscribed upon a card

which L'Homme, the cashier, placed regularly on the steel pin by his side—this sum always reached one hundred thousand francs, and was often eight or nine hundred thousand on days when any especial novelties were offered—but these figures no longer reverberated in his ear like the blast of a trumpet, and he began to feel almost a contempt and loathing for money.

But Mouret's sufferings were yet to increase. He became jealous. One morning Bourdoucle told him that the little girl in the cloak room was trifling with him.

"How do you mean?" he asked, becoming very white.

"Yes, she has lovers in this very house!"

Mouret summoned strength to smile.

"I had forgotten her, my dear fellow—speak. You need have no fear. Who are these lovers?"

"Huten, it is said, and a big stupid fellow in the lace room, Deloche by name. I don't speak of my own knowledge—but other people say that it is a fact."

There was a long silence. Mouret pretended to be arranging the papers on his desk. Presently he said, without looking up:

"Try and bring me proofs of what you say; though as I told you I have nearly forgotten her existence, but you know we can't tolerate such things in our House."

Bourdoucle answered quietly:

"You shall have proof enough one of these days. am on the look-out."

Then Mouret lost the remainder of his tranquility. He never had courage to refer to this conversation again, but lived in perpetual fear of a catastrophe. His anxiety rendered his temper something terrible, and the whole establishment looked on in dismay. He no longer concealed himself behind Bourdouce, but performed the executions with evident delight, and took pleasure in the abuse of that power which counted for nothing in the fulfillment of his only desire. Each of his inspections became a massacre, and when he appeared every one held his breath in painful suspense and dread. The dull season was coming on, and every day he dismissed a number of clerks. At first he thought of dismissing both Hutten and Deloche—then he reflected that if he did not retain them in his employment he should know nothing of their movements; he made others pay for this precaution, however, and when he was alone at night he paid for it, too.

One day, especially, terror reigned. An inspector became convinced that the glover, Mignol, stole. There were always strange-looking women hanging about his counter, and one of them had been arrested with sixty pairs of gloves on her person. A watch was instituted, and the inspector caught Mignol in the very act—aiding and abetting the adroit thieving of a tall blonde—a woman who had been employed at the *Louvre*, but had now fallen very low. The way Mignol managed was very simple: he pretended to try on a pair of gloves for her, while she packed away as

many as she could ; then he took her to the desk where she paid for one pair.

Mouret happened to be there at that time. As a rule, he preferred not to interfere in such affairs, which were by no means infrequent, for in spite of the apparent order of this great machine, there was scarcely a week that some employé was not dismissed for thefts.

The managers thought it wise to keep such matters as quiet as possible, and never called upon the police for assistance. This is in fact one of the fatal faults in these great bazars.

But this day Mouret had been sadly out of temper, and was extremely violent toward little Mignol, who trembled with fear.

"I have ten minds to call in the police," cried Mouret. "Answer me at once, who is this woman? Tell me the truth, or you will regret it."

The woman had been taken away, and two of the saleswomen were searching her.

"I do not know her, sir," stammered Mignol. "She came to my counter—"

"You are lying!" interrupted Mouret, with redoubled violence. "Is there no one here who will give me the information I ask? You hear me, all of you! It seems to me that I am in the forest of *Bondy*—robbed and pillaged at every turn. I am inclined to make a new rule, and not allow a salesman to leave at night without being searched."

Three or four customers, who were buying gloves, were frightened out of their wits, and one or two of the salesmen began to expostulate.

"Silence!" he cried, indignantly, "or I will dismiss you all."

Bourdoucle now appeared, dismayed at the idea of a scandal. He said a few words in a low voice to Mignol. The affair was serious, and Mignol was led to the inspectors' office near the door, on the Rue Gaillon. The woman was there, calmly fastening her dress. She had given the name of Albert L'Homme. Mignol hearing this, and again questioned, lost his head, and said that he was not the guilty party—it was Albert who sent these women to him. At first they did no harm, and when he saw them beginning to steal he was too far compromised to expose them.

Mouret now learned of a series of unprecedented thefts carried on by these women,—of purchases which a salesman neglected to call out when he took a customer to the desk, and the proceeds of which he shared with the cashier. He heard how clerks went out at night with packages of goods under their coats. For fourteen months this sort of thing had been going on, but Mignol could give no idea of the amount that had been stolen. The news spread all over the shop. Uneasy consciences trembled, and even the most honest feared dismissal. Albert had been summoned to the inspector's office. Then old L'Homme, looking as if he were about to have a stroke of apoplexy, went in also. And then Madame Aurélie was called, and she with her head thrown haughtily back and a face as white as marble, also disappeared behind the closed door.

This explanation lasted a long time; no one knew

precisely what took place. It was said that the forewoman had slapped her son's face, and the honest old father had shed bitter tears, and that Mouret, contrary to all his habits, had sworn like a trooper, and declared that he would have the guilty parties imprisoned. But the scandal was eventually hushed. Mignol was dismissed, Albert disappeared two days later. His mother had probably demanded and obtained the favor of a trifling postponement of the sentence. The disgrace to the family was less.

But a panic still reigned, for Mouret was in every part of the establishment at once, and if any one so much as looked up as he passed, he would say:

"Have you nothing to do, sir, but to count the flies on the ceiling? Go to the desk!"

The storm burst one day on Hutten's head. Favier, now "the second," was eager to dislodge Hutten and take his place. He made continual reports to the managers, and was perpetually exposing Hutten's faults.

One morning as Mouret was passing through the silk room he saw Favier changing the tickets on a whole bale of black velvet.

"Why are you lowering the price of these velvets?" he asked; "who bade you do so?"

The "second," who had made an ostentatious display of his occupation, answered with an air of innocent surprise:

"It was Monsieur Hutten, sir."

"Monsieur Hutten! and where is that gentleman?" And when Hutten appeared, there was a stormy scene. By what right had he changed the prices of these vel-

vets; who had authorized him to do so? Hutten looked greatly astonished, and said that he had given no positive orders to Favier; he had simply discussed with him the wisdom of such a step.

Then Favier put on the air of an employé who finds himself under the disagreeable necessity of contradicting his superior, though of course, he said, he was ready to accept the responsibility of the act, if Hutten insisted.

Mouret exploded:

"Understand, Monsieur Hutten," he cried "that I will tolerate no such impertinent independence. The directors alone have the power to change any of the marks."

He continued in a tone of sharp reproof, which surprised the salesman, for generally these discussions took place apart. They felt that Mouret was gratifying a personal enmity, and they remembered that Hutten was supposed to be the lover of Denise. It was evidently a comfort to him to make the salesmen feel that he was master, and he exaggerated things and ended by insinuating that the lowering of the prices on the velvets hid some dishonesty.

"Monsieur," said Hutten, respectfully, "I intended to ask you to reduce the velvets; they have not been a success."

Mouret stopped him, saying:

"Very good, sir, we will examine into the matter, and don't let us have any more of this sort of thing if you wish to remain in this House."

He walked off, leaving Hutten in a state of rage, and with only Favier to listen to his complaints. He would

send in his resignation, he said; he would fling it in the face of this brute.

Favier, with affected sympathy, led him on, saying that Mouret had been a very uncomfortable master for some time.

"Yes, and why?" asked Hutten. "Is it my fault if that little scamp in the cloak room made eyes at me, and now finds me in her way? Let her look out, that's all, if she comes in my path."

Two days later, as Hutten was going up to one of the work-rooms in the attic to give an especial order, he started on seeing at the end of a corridor, Denise and Deloche, leaning out of an open window, so absorbed in conversation that they never turned their heads. The idea of surprising them came to him suddenly, and when he saw that Deloche was weeping, he conceived the idea of betraying them. He therefore retired noiselessly, and meeting Bourdoucle and Jouve on the stairs he told them some story about a leak in the roof which they decided to investigate at once.

Bourdoucle was the first to see Denise and Deloche; he stopped short, and bade Jouve go at once for Monsieur Mouret, while he himself would remain there. The inspector was compelled to obey, although greatly annoyed at being involved in such an affair. It was a very quiet corner of this great establishment in which Denise had taken refuge, and only to be reached through a maze of winding corridors and stairs. The work-rooms occupied the entire attic, a series of rooms furnished with long tables and stoves. These rooms were occupied summer and winter by the workwomen

of the different Departments. The occasional customers who were brought here to give an order, stopped to take breath with a dizzy sensation, as if they had been going round and round for hours.

Denise had often found Deloche waiting for her here. As "the second" it was her duty to bring the orders up stairs from the cloak Department and see that they were executed. It was very easy for him to invent some pretext to follow her, and then pretend to be greatly surprised to meet her. She ended by laughing at him, and it got to be a tacit rendezvous in this place. The corridor ran along by the side of the reservoir, an enormous one, and outside on the roof there was another of the same size, reached by an iron ladder.

Deloche leaned against the reservoir as he talked. There was a ripple and sound of running water which was pleasant to hear. Denise looked around from time to time with a feeling that they were not quite alone; but very soon the window attracted them, and they leaned out talking and laughing together, exchanging reminiscences of their native province. Just below them extended the immense skylight of the central gallery, a lake of glass bordered by precipitous roofs like sharp, pointed rocks, and looking up they beheld the blue sky which was reflected in the glass with all its soft fleecy clouds. Deloche was talking of Valognes that day. "I was six years old; my mother took me to market in a *carriole*. You know we had to start at five o'clock in the morning. I can remember now, how lovely it was; were you ever there?"

"Yes," answered Denise looking off into the distance, "I went there once, but I was very little. I remember that the turf grew green on both sides the road, and sheep were browsing."

She stopped with a faint smile.

"Near us were narrow paths running along for leagues under tall trees. We had meadows, and hedges taller than I, in which were horses and cows. We had a little river, and the water was deliciously cool in one place that I remember so well."

"It was just the same with us!" cried Deloche in great delight. "There was grass, hawthorn blossoms and great elms, so green—a green that is never-seen in Paris. Ah! what happy hours I have spent on that little stony path coming down from the mill."

And their voices died away, they remained with their eyes fixed on the sunny lake made by the glass. A mirage rose from this blinding water, they saw a great stretch of pasture land bathed in luminous vapor in which the horizon faded away into the delicate gray of a water color sketch. And from below came the dull roar and thud of the great machine, which in their dream was transformed into the wind rustling among the grain and passing through the thick foliage of the tall trees.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Denise," stammered Deloche, "why are you not kinder? I love you so much."

Tears rose to his eyes, and as she tried to speak he continued hastily:

"No, let us talk a little more. When people come from the same country they always have much to talk about."

He choked with emotion, and she said gently:

"You are not reasonable. You promised to speak no more of that. It is quite impossible. I have a great friendship for you, because you are kind and good, but I wish to remain free."

"Yes, I know," he answered in a low agitated voice. "You do not love me. You need not say it, I know it already; there is nothing in me that you can love. I have never had but one happy hour, and that was the evening we were at Joinville. You remember? For a moment when we were under the trees I thought your arm trembled and I was stupid enough to think—"

But she stopped him. Her quick ear had heard the sound of Bourdoucle and Jouve's steps at the end of the corridor.

"Hark!" she said, "I hear some one."

"No," he answered, preventing her from leaving the window, "no, it was the reservoir; the strangest noises come from there; one would sometimes think it was full of people."

And he continued his tender caressing complaints. She did not listen to him. She was simply soothed by the music of his loving tone, and continued to look down on the roofs of the *Bonheur des Dames*. On the right and on the left were other galleries and other long halls, while the chimney of the kitchen smoked furiously at a little distance.

When Denise recalled her thoughts she saw that Deloche had taken her hand, and his face was so agitated that she did not withdraw it.

"Forgive me," he murmured. "It is all over now. I should be most unhappy were you to take your friendship from me. Yes, I begin to understand it all."

His emotion choked him, but he tried to steady his voice.

"I know my lot in life. It is not now that Fate will change it. I was miserable in Valognes, miserable in Paris. I have been four years here, and I am the lowest in my Department. I want to tell you not to be unhappy about me. I will not disturb you any more. Try to be happy. Try to love some one. Let me see you happy and I shall be so too."

He could say no more. As if to seal his promise he pressed his lips on the hand of the young girl; it was the humble kiss of a slave.

She was deeply touched, and said with a tenderness that softened the pity of the words:

"My poor boy!"

They started and turned. Mouret stood before them.

For ten minutes Jouve had been seeking the manager all through the great building, and finally found him on the scaffolding of the new façade, *Rue du Dix-Decembre*. This was his refuge when everything went wrong. He came away white with plaster and his feet muddy from the water running from the faucets. When Jouve found him he was examining some designs for the mosaics and tiles, which were to decorate the façade. At first he had answered that he could not be disturbed, but a word from the inspector induced him to follow him at once.

Bourdoucle and Jouve thought it best to disappear. Deloche fled and Denise was left alone with Mouret. She was paler than usual, but her eyes met his frankly.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "will you have the kindness to follow me?"

She followed him. They descended two flights, passed through the furniture rooms and carpet rooms, all in silence. When he reached his cabinet he threw open the door wide.

"Enter, Mademoiselle."

And he closed the door. He walked to his desk.

The new private office of the manager was more luxurious than the old one. Hangings of green velvet had replaced the former ones of rep, but the only ornament on the walls was the portrait of Madame Hédouin, a calm smiling face looking down from a gilt frame.

"Mademoiselle," he said at last, endeavoring to preserve his cold gravity, "there are certain things that cannot be tolerated here. Propriety of conduct is absolutely enjoined upon—"

He stopped, vainly seeking words that should not betray too much of the rage that choked him. What! Did she love this country lout instead of himself? Did she prefer this fellow, who was the laughing stock of the entire house, to him, the master? Had he not seen him covering her hand with kisses?

But to all this he made no allusion.

"I have been very good to you, Mademoiselle," he continued, making a new effort to speak. "I did not expect to be rewarded in this way."

Denise on entering the room had been attracted by the portrait of Madame Hédouin, and in spite of her emotion, continued to study it. Each time she entered and came out of that office, her eyes met those of this painted lady. She was a little afraid of her, but this time she regarded her as a protection.

"I admit, sir," she answered gently, "that I did wrong in stopping to talk, and I ask your pardon for the misdemeanor. This young man came from my own province."

"I will dismiss him!" cried Mouret, his despair finding utterance in this passionate exclamation.

And now dropping his dignity as a manager reproving a saleswoman for disobedience to orders, he burst forth in vehement reproaches.

"Was she not ashamed of herself?" he asked, and then followed atrocious accusations and Hutten's name, all with such vehemence that she could make no defence. The dignified explanation which he had promised himself as he followed Jouve, was debased to a scene of jealousy.

"Yes, your lovers!" he repeated. "I know it all now, though I have been stupid enough to doubt what I was told!"

Denise, suffocated and stunned, listened to these frightful reproaches. At first she did not understand. It was impossible that he should think such evil of her. But as his words became fiercer, she turned silently toward the door, and at a gesture he made to detain her, she said:

"No sir, I am going. If you believe what you say of me, I will not stay another hour in the House."

But he stopped in front of her.

"Speak!" he cried, "defend yourself at least. Say something."

She stood very erect before him in icy silence. He questioned her with an increasing anxiety, and the silent dignity of the young girl assumed in his eyes the ghastly proportions of the clever calculations of a woman of experience.

"You say he comes from your province, do you? Did you ever know him there? Swear that he is no more than a friend to you, if you dare."

Then as she wrapped herself in her silence, and laid her hand on the door to open it and go out, his agony burst forth in words.

"I love you!" he cried, "I love you! Why do you take pleasure in torturing me in this way? You know perfectly well that I worship you, and you alone! You have been told that I loved other women. I have given them all up, I never go out of this building in these days. That evening when I saw you trying on the mantle, did I not show my feelings toward you even in the presence of that lady. Have I not quarreled with her for your sake? If you fear that I shall return to her, you may make yourself easy, she is revenging herself, she is assisting one of my former clerks to start a rival establishment. Must I fall at your feet to touch your heart?"

He was ready to do anything, this man who would not tolerate the smallest peccadillo in his saleswomen, who dismissed them on the caprice of the moment, was now obliged to implore one of them not to

leave him. He stood with his back against the door ready to forgive her and to be blind if she lied to him.

He told the truth. He rarely left the *Bonheur* now. He never saw Clara and had not been at the house of Madame Desforges, where Bouthemont now reigned supreme, while awaiting the opening of his new establishment, to which he had given the name of "*Les Quatre Saisons*," and which was already advertised in every direction.

"Shall I kneel at your feet?" he murmured.

She arrested him with a quick gesture and when she could speak, for she was herself greatly moved, she said:

"You are wrong, sir. I swear that all you have heard to my discredit is false, utterly false. That poor boy is as innocent as myself."

And she lifted her clear, innocent eyes with entire frankness.

"I believe you," he said at last, "and I will not dismiss your old companion, since you have taken him under your protection. But why do you refuse me in this way if you love no one?"

The girl blushed deeply.

"You do love some one then?" he asked in a trembling voice. "Oh! you may tell me, I have no claim on your tenderness, you love some one?"

She colored still more violently, her heart was on her lips and she felt that to tell a falsehood with her lips, was impossible while her face spoke the truth.

"Yes," she said faintly, "I beg of you, sir, to let me pass, you distress me."

She was suffering in her turn. Was it not enough to be perpetually on her guard against him and her own heart, whose weakness was at times almost impossible for her to control.

When he spoke to her in this way, when she saw him so deeply moved, she wondered how she could have refused to listen to him. It was not so much the idea of right and wrong that she obeyed in doing so, as a certain instinct that made her long for a quiet, happy life. She would have given herself to him utterly and entirely, heart and soul, if she had not shrank from the uncertainties of the morrow.

Mouret did not understand this. He turned sadly to his desk and began to turn over his papers, saying as he did so: "I will not detain you longer, Mademoiselle. Of course, too, I cannot keep you in my service if you wish to leave us."

"But I do not wish to go away," she answered, with a smile. "If you believe in me I wish to remain. You should believe more in women, sir. I assure you that there are some good ones among us."

The girl's eyes as she spoke were involuntarily lifted to the portrait of Madame Hédouin, that good and beautiful woman whose blood shed for the house had brought it prosperity. Mouret followed the girl's eyes and started, for it seemed to him that he heard his dead wife speaking these words, which he recognized as one of her own phrases. It was almost like a resurrection; he found again in Denise, the good sense and calm judgment of her whom he had lost, and even her gentle voice, so sparing of useless words.

"You know that I belong to you," he said in a low voice. "Do with me what you please."

She answered gayly:

"You are right, sir. The advice of a woman, however humble she may be, is always useful, if she has a little intelligence, I mean, of course. I will make a good man of you if you will place yourself in my hands."

She was jesting but her sweet simplicity was singularly charming. He smiled faintly, and opened the door for her as if she had been a lady.

The next day Denise received the appointment of forewoman. The manager had created in her favor an especial Department for costumes for children, and Denise was installed in a room next to Madame Aurélie, who ever since her son had been dismissed, had trembled to see the power of this young girl steadily increasing. Would not she herself be sacrificed on the first occasion, and Denise be appointed in her place? The poor woman had grown very thin since the shame that had stained the L'Homme dynasty, while her poor husband equally troubled, showed marvellous energy in the performance of all his duties.

When therefore, she beheld Denise installed as forewoman in a new Department, she was so delighted, and such a heavy load was removed from her breast, that she showered the most affectionate attention upon the young girl, and made frequent visits to her room, as a queen mother visits a young queen.

Denise was now at the top of the ladder. The promotion just bestowed upon her had silenced every ill-

natured tongue. Marguérite who was now "second" in the *confections*, could not find sufficient words in which to sing her praises. Clara herself bowed her head with respect. But the triumph of Denise was still more complete over all these men. Jouve never spoke to her without the most obsequious deference, Hutten felt that his position was imperilled and Bourdoucle realized the uselessness of further struggles. When the latter saw her leave the Manager's room with her serene face, and knew the next morning that a new Department had been created simply in her favor, he bowed before this woman, as he had hitherto bowed before Mouret and his genius.

Meanwhile Denise was very charming; she was really touched by these marks of consideration which she received, and tried to think they were caused by sympathy in all her trials, and in her final success. She therefore welcomed with joy the smallest evidences of friendship and came to be sincerely loved by some of her companions. She evinced a dislike only for Clara, for she had learned that this girl was amusing herself by talking about Colomban's infatuation for herself, while the woman he was to have married lay dying. There was a great deal of talk in the *Bonheur* about them. But this trouble, real as it was, did not make Denise irritable. It was pleasant to see her in her own Department among children of all ages. She adored children and enjoyed her position; sometimes there were fifty or more of them, turbulent and wilful, as the best of children will sometimes be. The mothers lost their heads, but she, smiling and conciliatory, brought

the little people quickly to terms, and when she saw a child more than usually attractive, she herself fitted the dress over the dimpled shoulders, with the tender precautions of a big sister. Shrill laughs echoed through the room, baby voices chattered in baby dialect, while nurses and mothers scolded and expostulated. Sometimes a tall little girl nine or ten years old put on a paletot and studied herself seriously before the mirror, with eyes shining with a desire to please. On the counter were piled cashmere dresses of blue and pink for children under five, sailor costumes, others with plaited skirts and wide lace collars, coats and jackets, all tiny and attractive in their suggestiveness. Denise carried in her pocket sugar plums to assuage the grief of some little torment who was in despair at not being allowed to take possession of some fascinating costume to which she had taken a fancy. In short Denise lived among these children as if they were her own, and regained much of her childish gayety through her association with them.

She had long friendly conversations with Mouret. When she went to the Manager's room to receive orders, or make a suggestion, he detained her to talk with her a little. She was doing her best to make of him what she laughingly called "a good man." In her sensible little head—that of a clever Normandy woman—a hundred new projects were forming themselves. She had original ideas, such as she had expressed to Robineau, and to Mouret himself, the evening of their walk in the Tuileries. She could not but see a hundred things which required amelioration in

the mechanism of the *Bonheur*. She had been greatly disturbed ever since she entered the establishment, by the precarious lot of the employés. Their sudden dismissal grieved her sorely. She thought such lack of consideration was injurious not only to them but to the House itself.

She remembered, too, how keenly she had suffered in the first days of her service there, and immense compassion filled her heart at the sight of each new comer, who, with aching feet, weary head, and eyes filled with tears, concealed all her troubles under her silken robe, and bore the persecution of her companions with as good a grace as possible.

This life had an injurious effect on the saleswomen, who passed out of sight before they were forty, many of them dying from consumption, brought on by fatigue and bad air. A few married, and went to keep shops in some provincial town. Was it right? was it humane? was it just, to use up the life of human beings in this wholesale way? And Denise pleaded the cause of these minor wheels which kept the great machine going, not with sentimental reasons, but with arguments drawn from the interest of the employers. When one wants a good strong machine, good iron is used; if the iron breaks or is broken, the work all stops, and it is expensive to set things going again, as well as a great and unnecessary expenditure of strength.

As she talked, she became animated, for in her imagination she beheld an ideal bazar, a phalanstery of trade, where each would have his proportion of the

profits according to his merits, and where there was no anxiety for the morrow, because of a just agreement to which both sides would adhere.

Mouret's spirits rose. He accused her of socialism, and embarrassed her by pointing out the difficulties in the way of her project; but she talked on in the generous simplicity of her nature, without paying heed to what he said.

He, in the meantime, was fascinated and carried away by this fresh young voice—that trembled still with the memory of what she had undergone, while pointing out reforms which she wished could be instituted in the House. He listened with a laughing air, but, nevertheless, the lot of the employés was daily ameliorated—vacations were given in the dull season, instead of dismissing them, and finally a Mutual Benefit Society was organized, which assured to the salesmen and women resources in illness. This plan was the embryo of the vast societies to be formed among the working classes in the twentieth century.

Denise did not content herself with staunching wounds like those from which she had herself suffered. She had ideas that she whispered to Mouret which, carried into execution, charmed his customers. She enchanted L'Homme by encouraging a project of which he had long dreamed: that of creating a band of music, of which all the performers should be chosen from the employés of the House. Three months later L'Homme had one hundred and twenty musicians under his direction. The dream of his whole life was realized. A great *fête* was given in the shop—a con-

cert and a ball. The newspapers were full of it, and Bourdoucle was won over by the enormous increase in the receipts. Then a billiard room for the clerks was instituted, with two tables, checkers and cards. There was a course of study—English and German, arithmetic, grammar and geography were taught. There was a library—ten thousand volumes were placed at the disposal of the employés. There was a resident physician, baths and barbers. There was no need to go from under the roof of the *Bonheur des Dames* to seek anything. The old streets were thrown open to the sunlight, in which this new growth of modern enterprise prospered wonderfully.

A positive enthusiasm began to be felt for Denise, and all admitted that the relations between herself and Mouret were not those of lovers, and that her influence over him resulted from her steadfast refusal. She was very popular, for it was understood that all the new and pleasant things at the *Bonheur des Dames* was of her suggestion, and every one was glad that the master had found at last a strength superior to his own. She had come to be profoundly respected, and when she passed through the different Departments with her graceful head proudly carried, her gentle and yet firm manner, the salesmen greeted her with smiles, and were proud of her.

Denise was happy in this sunny atmosphere of praise and sympathy. How strange it was! She saw herself as she came there—when she was lost in this great machine, feeling like a grain of millet under rindstones that were crushing a world—and to-day

she was the moving spirit of this world, and could control the Colossus lying at her feet. She had not aimed at this result, she had simply presented herself without calculation—endowed only with the invincible charm of her sweetness. Her sovereignty sometimes caused her a sensation of uneasy surprise. Why did they all obey her? She was not pretty, and she was well behaved! Then she smiled, her heart was soothed, and she felt that her great love of truth and of logic was the secret of her strength.

One of the greatest comforts of Denise, now in the height of her power, was her ability to be useful to Pauline, who was far from well, and trembled lest she, as had been the case with two other saleswomen, should be peremptorily dismissed. The managers did not approve of maternity—regarding it as inconvenient and indecent. Marriage was unwillingly permitted, but children were frowned upon.

Pauline resolved to conceal her situation as long as possible, and resorted to many imprudent measures in doing so.

Bourdoucle, however, had his eyes upon her, and one morning led her aside and extorted a confession, then submitted the question to the managers, saying that in his opinion she had best go into the country for a few weeks. But Denise had time to interfere, and asked if the *Bonheur* was to treat these saleswomen in this brutal manner?

Finally it was decided that all such cases should have especial medical attention, and that no dismissals should be made on that account.

The next day, when Denise went up to see Pauline, who was indisposed, the poor girl kissed her warmly.

"How good you are! But for you they would have dismissed me."

Her husband was in the room, and he, too, was enthusiastic in his gratitude. But Pauline sent him away, saying in an affectionate tone of reproof:

"Ah! you do not know anything. Go, and leave us to talk together."

The infirmary was a long, light room, containing twelve beds, but Pauline was the only occupant. The bed was near one of the windows opening on the Rue Neuve Saint-Augustin. Denise sat down by the side of her friend, enjoying the quiet and the faint odor of lavender that came from the linen.

"It cannot be that you detest him," said Pauline, suddenly. "But why are you so severe with him? Pray open your heart to me."

She held her friend's hand, and Denise, startled by this sudden attack, blushed deeply. She felt her secret slipping from her, and hiding her face in the pillow she murmured: "I adore him!"

Pauline was thunderstruck.

"You adore him! Then why do you not say yes?"

Denise, with her face still hidden, answered with an energetic shake of her head. She could not tell Pauline that she persisted in her "no" precisely because she did love him. It would have sounded perfectly absurd in the ears of her friend.

Pauline did not speak for some minutes, and then he said:

"Do you intend, then, that he shall marry you?"

The young girl lifted her head, amazed at this suggestion.

"Marry me! Oh! no. I swear that such a thought never entered my head—and you know that I never lie."

"And why should you not think of marrying him?" answered Pauline, gently. "The affair must come to an end in some way, and I assure you every one thinks you hold yourself so high only that he may lead you to the Mayor's office. Good Heavens! What a strange woman you are!"

And she tried to console Denise, who had once more buried her head in the pillow, and was sobbing convulsively. She declared that she would go away, since she was credited with so many unworthy manœuvres. Of course, if a man loved a woman, he ought to marry her. But she expected nothing of the kind; she had made no such calculation; she only wished to be allowed to live quietly alone, with her own joys and sorrows. Yes, she would go away.

At the same moment Mouret was making his usual morning examination of the new building, which was still hidden behind the vast erection of planks. A whole army of decorators was at work there. The group over the central door had been heavily gilded, and the pedestals stood ready to receive the statues representing the manufacturing cities of France. From morning until night little groups gathered along the *Rue du Dix-Decembre*, which had been recently opened. They could see nothing of all that

was going on behind the planks, but that did not prevent them from telling the most marvellous tales of this building, which, when opened to the public, would astonish Paris. And it was in this very place, among the artists who were realizing his dream, that Mouret came to brood with more bitterness than ever over the vanity of his success. He had been driven there by the sting of the wound made by Denise, which seemed this day almost impossible to bear.

The building was nearly finished, but it now looked to him trivial and unmeaning, and it might have covered square after square without filling the void in his heart, made by the persistent "no" of that child.

When Mouret returned to his office he threw himself into his chair, and sat for an hour absorbed in thought. What did she want? A confused idea of marriage entered the head of the young widower for the first time. He was miserably unhappy.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE morning in November, Denise was giving her first orders in her Department, when the servant from her uncle's came in to say that Mademoiselle Geneviève had had a very bad night, and wished to see her cousin at once. The young girl had been daily growing weaker for some time, and there had been a decided change for the worse.

"Say that I will come at once," answered Denise, anxiously.

The blow that had finished Geneviève was the sudden disappearance of Colomban. At first he had fallen into the habit of sleeping out, and then one Monday he did not return, but wrote Monsieur Baudu a simple letter of adieu, written with the careful phraseology of a man who meditates suicide. Perhaps in the bottom of his heart he thought this a good way of getting out of a disastrous marriage. The woollen draper's shop promised no future of success, and the occasion was a good one, and all those who knew him would look upon him as the victim of a fatal passion.

When Denise entered her uncle's shop, she found Madame Baudu there alone. She was seated behind the desk, with her face as white as usual. There was now no clerk; the cook dusted off the counters, and there was even some talk of dismissing her and engag-

ing the occasional service of a charwoman. The shop was damp and chilly; hours elapsed without a customer appearing, and the merchandize that was now rarely moved became more and more permeated with the dust from the building.

"What is it?" asked Denise, hastily, "Is Geneviève any worse?"

Madame Baudu did not at once reply. Her eyes filled with tears. Then she said:

"I don't know; they haven't told me. Ah! it is all over, there is no hope!" And her eyes wandered around the dark shop as if she felt that their prosperity and her child had departed together. The seventy thousand francs produced by the sale of the property of Rambouillet had melted away in less than two years in the last struggle with the *Bonheur*, and was finally crushed by the display of such cloths and flannels at the great establishment as had never before been seen in the *quartier*. Baudu's debts increased, and he finally decided as a last resource, to mortgage the old furniture in *la Rue de la Michodière*, which had been there ever since the original foundation of the House.

"Baudu is up stairs," said his wife, in her trembling voice. "We take turns in staying with her two hours at a time. Some one of course must be in the shop, and yet I really do not see why, for ——." Her gesture finished her sentence. They would have put up their shutters but for their old commercial pride, which made them unwilling to submit to this last mortification.

"Then I will go up, dear aunt," said Denise, whose heart ached for the woes she could not mitigate, and

at the despairing resignation which the very pieces of broadcloth seemed to exhale.

"Yes, my child, go up. She has asked to see you repeatedly. She has, I believe, something important to say."

But at this moment Baudu appeared. His face was yellower than ever and his eyes bloodshot. He walked as softly as if still in the sick room, and whispered as if he could be heard up-stairs.

"She is asleep!"

And with trembling limbs he crossed the shop and seated himself, wiping his brow and drawing a long breath, like a man who has been performing some heavy task. A long silence followed, and then he said to Denise:

"You shall see her presently; when she sleeps we always think she is better."

Another long silence. The father and mother looked at each other drearily. Then, in a low voice, and without naming any one, he recapitulated his sorrows.

"My head is under the knife; I would not have believed it. He was just the same as a son to me. If any one had said, 'Oh! they will take him too,' I should have laughed my informant to scorn. He was a good business man; he knew what he was about, and he had all my ideas, and wasn't in the least like the conceited rascals in these modern establishments."

He shook his head, while his eyes were vaguely wandering over the damp brick floor that had been trodden by generations of customers.

"Do you-know," he continued in a lower

"there are moments when I think myself greatly to blame that our poor daughter is so ill up-stairs. I ought to have married them at once without yielding to my accursed pride, to my obstinacy, which made me reluctant to abandon my business when it was not prosperous. But she could have had him whom she loved, and then youth and energy might have done wonders and accomplished the miracle that was beyond me. I am an old idiot, and I had no idea that girls fell ill for such things. To be sure, the boy was very remarkable; he was clever, honest and simple in his manners,—in short, he did credit to my bringing up."

He lifted his head, defending his own theories, while he defended the clerk who had betrayed him. Denise was deeply touched by the humility of her uncle's voice, by his eyes, heavy with tears.

"Uncle!" she cried, "do not excuse him, I beg of you. He has never loved Geneviève; he would have run away long ago, had you shown any desire to hasten the marriage. I have spoken to him myself; he knew perfectly well that my poor cousin was suffering on his account, and yet you see that did not prevent him from leaving. Ask my aunt."

Without opening her lips, Madame Baudu assented with a movement of her head. Then the poor man became paler than before, and his tears fairly blinded him; he stammered:

"It is in his blood; his father died last year from dissipation."

His eyes wandered mechanically from the empty counters to the crowded shelves, and then back to his

wife, who sat stiffly at the desk, in the vain expectation of customers who never came.

"It is ended," he said; "they have killed our business, and now one of their rascals has killed our child."

No one spoke again. The noise of the carriages rolling past filled the shop with their reverberation. Suddenly, above this dull roar, came a sound of some one knocking; it was Geneviève, who had awakened and who was tapping with a stick that was left near her bed.

"Let us hurry up," said Baudu, rising with a start. "Try to laugh, she must not suspect."

He rubbed his eyes with his hand to efface the traces of tears. As soon as he opened the door above, a hollow, faint voice was heard.

"Oh! I will not be left alone. Oh! do not leave me alone. Oh! I am afraid of being alone."

When she saw Denise, Geneviève became calmer and smiled tenderly at her cousin.

"You have come then! I have been longing for you since yesterday. I thought you too had abandoned me!"

It was a pitiful scene. The young girl's window looked out on a court-yard; it was a small room filled with yellow light. In the beginning the parents had given her their own apartment on the street, but the sight of the *Bonheur des Dames* was so distressing to them all that they decided to take her back to her own room. There she lay, so slender and emaciated under the coverings that it was difficult to believe the living form was there. Her thin arms, burned away

the fever common in consumption, seemed absolutely plump when one looked from them to her poor face which was the last of a long race degenerated in the shadow and dampness of this old shop.

Meanwhile Denise with an aching heart stood looking down upon her cousin ; she did not speak, for she was struggling with her tears. Finally she murmured :

"I came at once, as soon as I knew. Ah ! if I could only be of use to you. You sent for me, would you like me to remain with you ?"

Geneviève, with panting breath and hands restlessly moving among the folds of the sheet, did not move her eyes from her cousin's face.

"No thank you, I do not need anything, I only wished to kiss you once more."

Tears slowly made their way from under her heavy lashes. Then Denise leaning down quickly kissed her on her hollow cheeks, shivering at their scorching heat. But the sick girl put her arms around her cousin and held her in a desperate embrace ; then she looked toward her father.

"Shall I stay ?" repeated Denise. "Is there nothing I can do ?"

"No, no—"

Geneviève's eyes were still riveted on her father, who at last understood and went down stairs.

When his heavy steps ceased, the sick girl snatched her cousin's hand and drew her close to her side.

"Tell me, is he with that woman ? Yes, I wanted to see you, for there was no one to tell me. Are they not living together ?"

Denise, in her surprise at this sudden question, was obliged to admit the truth, that this at all events was the report in the shop.

"But if you love him so much," continued Denise, to give the dying girl some shadow of hope, "he may yet return to you. Make haste and get well, he will yet marry you."

Geneviève interrupted her. She had listened with her whole soul, and in her eagerness had lifted herself to a sitting posture. But she sank back now.

"No, it is all over now. I say nothing, because poor father weeps and because my mother would be ill, but I am going away and I know it well; and if I send for you to night it is not because I am afraid of going away in the darkness. Father in Heaven! When I think that he is not even happy!"

When Denise attempted to say that her condition was by no means so grave, Geneviève threw back the coverings and showed her emaciated form.

"Look at me!" she murmured. "Is there any hope?"

Trembling from head to foot, Denise turned away, as if afraid of destroying this frail creature with the very breath from her lips.

Geneviève slowly drew the bedclothes again up under her chin.

The two women looked at each other for a moment, not knowing what more to say, then Geneviève spoke:

"Do not stay, you have your business to attend to. Thank you very much. I was tortured with a craving to know, and now I am content. If you see him, tell

him I forgive him. Farewell, dear Denise. Kiss me once more for the last time."

The young girl embraced her with tears and protests.

But Geneviève shook her head. She smiled faintly, and as her cousin turned at last to the door, she said:

"Stop a moment. Knock with a stick, that papa may come up before you go. I am afraid to be alone."

When Baudu entered this dreary little room in which he spent so many sad hours, she affected an air of gayety and called after Denise:

"Do not come to-morrow, it is useless. But on Sunday, I shall expect you to spend the afternoon with me."

The next day at twilight Geneviève died, after four hours of agony. The funeral was to take place Saturday. The day was dark and the heavens seemed to hang lower than usual.

The Baudu shop was all hung with white, and was the only light spot in the street.

The candles burning within seemed like stars. Bouquets of white roses and wreaths covered the bier, the long narrow bier of a young girl. It stood just outside the shop door so near the gutter that the passing carriages spattered the draperies.

At nine o'clock in the morning, Denise had gone there to remain with her aunt. But just as the funeral procession was about to start, Madame Baudu, who had no more tears to shed, implored her to follow the body and watch over her uncle, whose silence and apathy greatly terrified them.

The young girl found that the street was crowded.

All the small shop-keepers in the vicinity wished to show the Baudus sympathy and respect. There was too in this same eagerness, a certain manifestation against the *Bonheur des Dames*, which was most agreeable to themselves. They all felt that Mouret was accountable for Geneviève's death. All the victims of this monster establishment were there assembled, Bedoré and his sister, the furrier, the Vaupouille brothers and Deslignières, the man who had formerly kept the little toy shop around the corner; even Mademoiselle Tatin, and the glover Quinette, who had been swept away long since, felt it their duty to come, one from Batignolles and the other from near the Bastille, where they were making a new start.

While awaiting the hearse, which had been delayed through some mistake, this crowd, all clothed in black, gazed with eyes of hate on the *Bonheur*, whose polished shining windows, and gay aspect, seemed almost insulting, opposite the old Baudu shop with its heavy sorrow. A few curious faces looked from the windows of the *Bonheur*, but the great machine puffed on careless and ignorant of the death and disaster it created in its path.

Denise looked about for her brother Jean. She finally saw him standing just in front of the Bonnat shop. She joined him there and begged him to keep close to his uncle, and to support him if he seemed to find any difficulty in walking. For some weeks Jean had been very grave, as if troubled by some anxiety. He was that day buttoned tightly into a black overcoat. He was quite prosperous at this time and made

his twenty francs per day. He seemed so sad and at the same time so dignified that Denise was quite struck by it, for she had no idea how much he loved their cousin.

Desirous of avoiding all this useless woe for Pépé, Denise had left him with Madame Gras, promising herself, however, that she would go for him that afternoon and bring him to kiss his uncle and aunt.

The hearse did not come, and Denise stood watching the slow burning of the candles, when she started at the sound of a voice behind her. It was Bonnat. He had beckoned to an old man who sold chestnuts on the opposite side of the street, and was now saying to him:

"Vigouroux, do me a favor, will you? You see, I fasten this button, but if anyone should meddle with it, just bid him go about his business. But I don't believe you will be bothered. There won't be any one here."

Bonnat then relapsed like the others into a waiting attitude. Denise glanced into his shop. It was a pitiful scene of disorder, shabby parasols and umbrellas, with a few wretched looking canes. All the embellishments he had made, the fresh paint, the mirrors, the gilding on the signs, were all gone, soiled already. The old cracks had reappeared, the old spots of mould had made their way through the new decorations, but the shop still clung to the side of the *Bonheur* like a shabby excrescence.

"Ah! the miserable wretches!" sighed Bonnat. "They have killed her and are now doing their best to prevent her being carried away!"

The hearse had at length arrived, but its wheels

had become entangled in those of one of the vans belonging to the *Bonheur*, whose varnished panels glittered as it finally released itself and rolled rapidly on.

The old merchant looked after it and then glanced obliquely at Denise from under his bushy eyebrows.

The funeral procession slowly formed in the profound silence of the street, for the omnibuses and the *fiacres* had come to a stand. When the hearse had crossed the Place Gaillon the crowd that followed it glanced through the large windows of the great shop, where only a few of the saleswomen took the trouble to look out. Baudu followed the hearse with a heavy dragging step. He had refused to take Jean's arm, but the youth kept close to him. Then after the crowd came three carriages. As the procession passed through the *Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs*, Robineau ran out to join it, looking pale and old.

At Saint-Roch there was a crowd of women waiting who had feared to encounter the crowd in the Baudu house. The manifestation of respect became almost an *émeute*, and when, after the service, the procession again started, all the men joined it, although there was a long and tedious march to make from the *Rue Saint-Honoré* to the Montmartre Cemetery.

Once more it was necessary to pass the *Bonheur des Dames*—it seemed as if the body of the young girl was carried around the great shop like the first victim that fell under the balls of the soldiers in the Revolution. At the door hung red flannels and a display of brilliant carpets, covered with enormous roses and drooping peonies.

Denise had taken a seat in a carriage. She was so worn out with tears and anxieties that she had not strength to walk. There was another stoppage in the *Rue du Dix-Decembre*, just in front of the scaffolding around the new building, for it greatly impeded the movements of the public. And here the young girl noticed that old Bonnat had fallen behind, and was dragging himself along in the tracks of the very carriage in which she sat. He would never get to the cemetery in that way. She stopped the carriage. He, after looking at her a moment, accepted her invitation and got in.

"My legs are not what they once were, I must admit," he growled, "but it is quite a pity that I must join you, for upon my word we like each other none too well!"

She felt that he was kind and friendly, in spite of his words. He scolded her, and declared he never respected Baudu half as much as now that he had shown that he would never give in.

The procession was moving slowly on, and leaning out she beheld her uncle just behind the hearse, his slow, heavy step apparently marking the pace for the whole *cortege*. She sank back into a corner, listened to the endless phrases of the old umbrella maker, and abandoned herself to the soothing motion of the carriage.

"The police ought to keep the streets clear. For eighteen months they have been impassable by reason of all this building. I hear a man was killed here the other day, but what does that matter? Before long

they will build bridges across the streets. There are two thousand seven hundred employés in that same *Bonheur*, and a hundred million francs. Good Lord! A hundred million francs!"

Denise had nothing to say to this. The procession was now in the *Rue de la Chaussée d'Autin*, where the number of carriages rendered their progress very slow.

Bonnat continued to talk in a vague, meaningless way, almost as if he were dreaming aloud. He did not yet understand the triumph of the *Bonheur des Dames*, but he admitted the defeat of the old manner of doing business.

"That poor Robineau looks desperate," he muttered, "and those other dealers are done up as well as myself. Deslignières will have a shock of apoplexy, Piot and Revoué have had the jaundice. We are a nice collection of scarecrows to do honor to this dear child! I hear this sort of thing is still going on, and new failures may be expected. The scoundrel has new Departments—flowers, perfumery, and perhaps shoes and boots, who can say? Grognot, the perfumer on the *Rue de Grammont* is going to move away, and the shoemaker next to him. The same pestilence has swept clean the *Rue Sainte-Anne*, where Lacassagne keeps feathers and flowers, and even Madame Chaudeuil, whose hats are so well known, will be done for in two years, for when dry goods people undertake to sell soaps and galoshes they may as well sell fried potatoes. Tut! Tut! What a world this is!"

The hearse was crossing the *Place de la Trinité*, and

from her corner of the old carriage she could see it as it turned into the *Rue Blanche*.

Behind her uncle, with his heavy step, toiled the crowd, and it seemed to her that all these ruined tradesmen were like a flock of sheep led to the slaughter house.

Bonnat still talked on.

"At all events," he said, "I am holding my own; but I have had a terrible sum of money to pay to advocates and the like. But at all events they won't go under my shop, for the court has decided that such a work cannot come under the head of necessary repairs. I hear he is talking of having a *salon* in the basement, kept all the time lighted with gas, that silks for evening may be exhibited there. The whole world, it seems to me, are on their knees before his money—all but myself. I don't intend to worship it, not even if I go to the wall. He says yes, and I say no, and I shall continue to say it, until I am nailed up between four planks, like that little girl we are following."

When they reached the *Boulevard de Clichy*, the carriage rolled on faster, and the crowd did the same, with the unconscious haste of a funeral procession eager to complete their sad duties.

Bonnat omitted only one thing in his talk—he said no word of the abject poverty into which he had fallen.

Denise knew it, however, and finally exclaimed:

"Dear Monsieur Bonnat, do be good once more; let me arrange matters."

He interrupted her with a violent gesture.

"Hold your tongue!" he exclaimed, "I will not permit any interference. You are a good little girl, I know that you are making this man miserable and I thank you for it. He thought you and my house were both for sale it seems, and he made a great mistake. What would you say if I were to advise you to say yes? What sort of an opinion would you have of me? Now then, when I say no, don't you meddle."

The carriage now stopped before the gate of the cemetery; he descended with his companion. The Baudu tomb was in the first avenue on the left. In a few minutes the ceremony was over, Jean led his uncle away, who turned to gaze at the yawning hole with a dazed sort of air. The procession scattered among the tombs; the faces of these shopkeepers which had lost all their color in their unhealthy shops, assumed a look of gray misery under this leaden sky. When the hearse slowly moved away, they as slowly followed.

"Poor little girl!" said Bonnat to Denise, who was still near him. "It seems to me that all these wretched looking creatures should be buried with her. I understand though. The old way of business is dying with these white roses that we drop on her grave."

Denise took her uncle and her brother back in the carriage; the day had been to her one of intolerable sadness. She began to be very uneasy about Jean, whose pallor was excessive, but when she came to understand that it was one of his perpetual adventures she attempted to silence him by opening her purse; but he shook his head and refused. No, it was a

a very different matter now, she was the niece of a rich confectioner and never accepted any gift from him, not even a bunch of violets. Then when Denise went to see P  p   at Madame Gras, that lady declared that he was too big for her to keep any longer.

Denise felt that this change would entail great trouble and anxiety, for a school must be found and perhaps a separation would be necessary.

She finally took P  p   to his uncle's that he might say a few words of consolation to the old people.

She found the shop closed, and the uncle and aunt together in the little dining-room, where they had forgotten to light the gas, in spite of the sad darkness of a winter day. They were now alone in their house which seemed slowly crumbling into dust. Uncle Baudu, unable to sit still, continued to walk around and around the table with the same heavy step with which he had followed his daughter to the grave, while Aunt Baudu sat in silence, with the white face of one wounded unto death, whose life blood is ebbing away, drop by drop. They neither of them shed a tear when P  p   flung himself into their arms, and pressed loving kisses on their cold cheeks.

That same evening Mouret had sent for Denise to talk to her about a child's garment that he wished to introduce, something quite new, a mixture of a Scotch suit and a Zouave costume, and with a heart overflowing with pity and a sense of ill-usage somewhere, she had been unable to contain herself, but began to talk of Bonnat. When he heard the name of this old umbrella man, Mouret lost his temper. "An old

fool," he said, "who marred all the satisfaction he might have had in his new building, whose miserable little hovel disgraced the *Bonheur des Dames*, and ruined its entire appearance." The subject had come to assume in Mouret's eyes the most exaggerated proportions, and now that Denise had undertaken to speak in favor of Bonnat, Mouret felt that he could tear down the little shop with his own hands.

"What," he asked, "was he expected to do?" Did they wish him to submit to this eyesore for the rest of his life? He enumerated the offers he had made to the old man. Had he not been liberal enough? Nevertheless he was willing to give any sum that was asked, but his patience was now gone.

Denise listened with downcast eyes, having nothing to say that he would accept as reasons.

"The poor man is so old, and if he should fail, he would die of the disgrace," she said.

Then he answered that he could no longer decide upon the question, it was before the council now, Bourdoucele would carry it through.

Denise could of course say no more.

After a painful silence, Mouret began to talk of the Baudus and expressed great sympathy for the loss of their daughter. They were excellent people who had been extremely unlucky. Then he repeated his arguments; they had really brought their misfortunes on their own heads by persisting in carrying on their business in an old fashioned way, in that dark, worm-eater shop; surely it was not amazing that they had come grief. He had predicted it twenty times or more; s

herself might remember that he had begged her to warn her uncle that disasters were impending, if he persisted in his old fashioned notions. The catastrophe had come, and no one in the world could help them now. Surely people would not be so unreasonable as to ask that he should ruin himself in order to spare the *quartier*. Besides, were he to close the *Bonheur* another large shop would rise from its ashes, for the day had come when the success of his ideas was felt on all sides. Mouret as he talked, became more and more enthusiastic, and showed considerable emotion in defending himself against the hatred of his involuntary victims, and the clamor from these stagnating little shops which he heard arising around him.

"Let the dead bury the dead!" he said, and with a gesture he swept into a common grave the skeleton of the antique method of doing business, whose mildewed remains were the shame of the sunny streets of new Paris. No, he felt no remorse, he was doing simply the task that belonged to the age in which he lived. She knew this, he added, for she understood something of life and had extended ideas.

Denise listened in silence for some time, and then withdrew, with her heart greatly troubled.

That night Denise did not sleep, except for brief intervals, and when she closed her eyes, she had troubled dreams. It seemed to her that she was again very little, and was crying bitterly at the foot of the old garden at Valognes as she watched the sparrows eat the spiders who had themselves devoured the flies. Was it then true that the whole world must grow fat at the

expense of others, and that this incessant struggle for life pushed others into an abyss where they were destroyed? Then she beheld again the grave in which Geneviève was laid. She saw her aunt and uncle sitting alone in their sad dining-room. In the profound silence she heard a strange crackling sound; it was the Bonnat shop breaking away as if undermined by rushing waters. Then came a long silence followed by another crash. The Robineaus, the Bedorés, the Vau-pouilles, all crumbled to pieces under the invisible pick-axe, with sudden, brief thunder, like a car load of stone poured down.

She awoke with a start and a pang of intense pity. What suffering—how many women and children—how many old people were reduced to poverty! She could do nothing to aid them, and was, also, fully conscious that these changes were necessary for the welfare of Paris. When dawn came, she lay with her sad eyes fixed on the whitening windows. Yes, every Revolution had its martyrs; the word to advance, always meant walking over dead bodies. The fear of being hard-hearted, of having added to the sorrows of her relatives, faded away before these irremediable evils, which are the labor-pains of every new generation. She ended with a determination to find some way of alleviating these sorrows, or at all events, of saving her own people the misery of the final crash.

Mouret now rose before her, with his passionate head, his tender eyes. He would never refuse her anything, she was sure; he would grant these people every relief in his power. She thought of him steadily for

some time, trying to decide on certain points in his character. She knew his life, and was by no means unaware of how large a part women had played in his life; but she did her best to forget these adventures, of which the whole House talked, and determined to think only of his wonderful cleverness and genius. Her heart was full of tenderness for him, in spite of the tortures she inflicted upon him by her disdain.

That very morning Denise went to Mouret, and learned what compensations he would pay to the Baudus and to old Bonnat, if they yielded. Weeks elapsed; she went to see her uncle almost every afternoon for a few minutes, with the hope that she would cheer him a little. Her aunt made her very uneasy, for she sat for hours at a time in a stupor. It seemed as if her life were gradually ebbing away. If she was questioned in regard to her health, she answered with an astonished air, that she was perfectly well, only tired and sleepy. All her acquaintances shook their heads as they heard this; "the poor lady," they said, "would not linger long after her daughter."

One day Denise was leaving the Baudus, when at the corner of the Place Gaillon she heard a loud cry. The crowd on the sidewalk precipitated themselves toward the point whence this cry came. An omnibus, one of those that run from the Bastille to Batignolles, had run over a man at the corner of the *Rue Neuve Saint-Augustin*. The driver was standing, and endeavoring to hold in his horses that were rearing and plunging. The man was swearing frightfully.

The omnibus was finally stopped; the crowd

gathered around the injured man; a policeman or two appeared on the scene.

The omnibus driver, calling on his passengers to testify to the truth of his words, declared that the man suddenly appeared among the feet of his horses.

Then a painter who was at work on a house opposite said to the driver:

"I saw the man; you were not to blame; he threw himself on the ground; I am ready to swear to it."

Other voices now swelled the tumult, and confirmed the idea of a suicide. Several ladies left the omnibus, and hurried away, feeling that they should never forget the sick horror of that minute when they felt a brief shock, and passed over the body.

Denise approached, eager to be of use, and drawn by that active pity which induced her to offer assistance, if she heard of an injured dog, a horse with a broken leg, or of men fallen from a roof; and lying on the sidewalk, she saw the poor creature, utterly unconscious.

"Ah! it is Monsieur Robineau!" she cried, in her sad amazement.

The policeman at once interrogated the young girl. She gave her name and her address. Thanks to the energy of the driver, the omnibus had passed over Robineau's legs instead of across his body; but it was feared that they were both broken. Four men carried the poor fellow into a druggist's, while the omnibus went on.

"A nice day's work I have made of it!" muttered the driver, as he lifted his long whip.

Denise followed the men who bore Robineau into

druggist's, who said after sending for a physician, that as there was no immediate danger, it would be better to carry the wounded man to his home, since he lived in the vicinity.

A man went to the station to ask for a litter. Then the young girl determined to hurry on and prepare Madame Robineau for this terrible blow. But she had great difficulty in passing through the crowd that had gathered about the door and was momentarily increasing. Each new comer heard a new account of the accident. The last story was that a husband had thrown the lover of his wife out of the window.

Denise saw Madame Robineau standing at the door as soon as she turned the corner of the *Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs*, and as she approached the girl tried to smile. She stopped to talk with Madame Robineau a few minutes, and wondered how it was possible to soften such terrible intelligence. The shop had found its Waterloo the day that the *Bonheur* had reduced the price of their silks, and for the last two months Robineau had led a most miserable life, simply putting off his bankruptcy from day to day.

"I saw your husband on the *Place Gaillon*," murmured Denise, who had at last entered the shop.

Madame Robineau, who seemed very uneasy and could not keep her eyes from the street, answered eagerly:

"Ah! yes, a few moments ago, I suppose? I have been watching for him. He ought to have come in long since. Monsieur Gaujean came, and they went together."

She was still very pretty, but she looked anxious.

and harassed. "Why," she often asked, "could they not live quietly and comfortably in one room with a crust of bread? What was the use of all this worry?"

"My dear child," she said with her faint sad smile, "we need not conceal anything from you. My poor dear is very miserable, he does not sleep, and this very day Gaujean has been tormenting him by talking of notes that are due. I was beginning to feel very anxious."

And she was going back to the door, when Denise stopped her. The young girl had heard the approach of the crowd and her imagination depicted the litter and the curious people.

Her throat felt parched, she could find no words of consolation, and yet it was necessary that she should speak.

"Do not be uneasy," she stammered, "there is no immediate danger. Yes, I saw Monsieur Robineau, and an accident has happened to him. He is being brought home, but you must not be uneasy."

The young wife listened with parched lips and suspended breath, without fully comprehending the words she heard. The crowd was already at her door. The men had placed the litter on the sidewalk to open both doors of the shop.

"It was an accident," repeated Denise, resolved to conceal the attempt at suicide. "He was crossing the street and slipping, fell under the wheels of an omnibus. Oh! only the feet. A physician has been sent for, but you must not be uneasy."

Madame Robineau trembled from head to foot, she

uttered two or three inarticulate exclamations, and then running to the litter pulled aside the curtains. The men were waiting for the physician to come, for no one dared move Robineau until his arrival. He had recovered consciousness and his sufferings were terrible. When he saw his wife big tears ran slowly down his cheeks. She kissed him tenderly and wept bitterly as she looked at him. In the street the crowd continued to increase, with faces as eager as if at the theatre.

The litter was now within the shop and in order to escape all these curious eyes, and also considering it inexpedient under the circumstances to leave the shop open, Denise determined to lower the metallic curtain. She turned the screw with her own hand and the curtain fell as on the dénouement of a tragedy at the theatre, and when she returned to the shop and closed the small door after her, she found Madame Robineau kneeling by her husband's side in the faint light that came from the two star-like apertures cut in the curtain. The ruined shop seemed to be fading away.

Madame Robineau said over and over again :

"Oh! my beloved! my beloved! my beloved!"

She had no other words than these, and he lay choked with physical and mental agony at the sight of her woe.

"Forgive me," he moaned, "I have been mad. When the lawyer told me before Gaujean that the announcement of my bankruptcy would be in to-morrow's papers, it seemed to me as if the very wall were on fire. I do not know just what I did. As I came down the

Rue de la Michodière and saw the *Bonheur* it seemed to me that the great building was laughing at me, and then when the omnibus came around the corner, I thought of L'Homme and his arm and I threw myself under the wheels."

Madame Robineau slipped down upon the floor. "Good God! he wished to die!" she cried.

She caught the hand of Denise, whose tears were pouring down her cheeks.

The wounded man had fainted again. Why did not the doctor come? Two men were again sent for him, and the *concierge* also started in search.

"Don't be uneasy!" said Denise mechanically, now sobbing also.

Then Madame Robineau, sitting on the floor with her head leaning against the litter on which lay her husband, opened her heart to her friend.

"It was on my account that he wished to die. He said to me over and again: 'I have stolen your money, for I had none of my own.' In the night he dreamed of those sixty thousand francs, and waking with a start he would say, that none but a fool speculated with money that was not his own. You know he was always nervous and excitable, and finally he began to talk about seeing me begging my bread in the street; he said he would kill me, for he loved me so tenderly, and wished to see me rich and happy."

Turning her head she saw that her husband's eyes were again open and fixed on her, and she went on in her piteous tones:

"Oh! my beloved, why have you done this thing

Did you think me so mean and so cruel? What does it matter if we are ruined, so that I have you—so that we are together? Let them take everything, and we will go away somewhere where you shall never hear of them again! You shall work when you are well, and so will I."

Her face was bowed low over her husband. There was a long silence in this dim shop. The din of the street came to them half smothered.

Finally Denise, who was watching at the little door, came back to say that the doctor was coming.

He was a young man, with quick keen eyes, who appeared with the *concierge*. He made an examination of the wounds and found that only one ankle was broken. It was a simple fracture, and there seemed to be no complication to dread.

At this moment Gaujean appeared; he came to say that he had played his last card and the failure must be announced the next day.

"What has happened?" he asked in amazement.

Denise told him in a few words. Then Robineau said faintly:

"I don't want to reproach you, but all this is a little your fault."

"Ah! my dear fellow," answered Gaujean, "we should not have tried to play such a game. We were not strong enough."

As Robineau was carried to his chamber on the litter he had strength to say:

"No, we were not strong enough, I know, but we should have been wiser. I can see how men old and

obstinate like Bonnat and Baudu might resist, but we who were young, should have accepted the new order of things. The end of the world seems near, Gaujean!"

Madame Robineau embraced Denise. She was almost joyous at being at last released from all business annoyances. And as Gaujean left the shop with the young girl he confessed to her that Robineau was right; it had been a great piece of folly to struggle against the *Bonheur des Dames*. He himself was utterly ruined; he had made a secret attempt to obtain assistance from Hutten, but had received little encouragement, and now, knowing the power of Denise, was trying to interest her.

"It is a bad thing for the manufacturers," he said. "They will all laugh at me and tell me that I am ruined in fighting for others. I remember your saying some time ago that manufacturers must keep ahead of progress by a better organization and new methods."

Denise smiled as she replied: "You must go and say that to Monsieur Mouret. Your visit will give him great pleasure. And he will bear you no malice if you offer him merely a profit of a centime on a yard!"

It was in January that Madame Baudu died. It was on a bright sunny afternoon. For a fortnight she had been unable to go down to the shop, which was left in charge of a woman who was hired by the day.

The poor lady sat up in her bed supported by pillows. Her eyes alone were living in her pale face, and these eyes she kept riveted on the *Bonheur des Dames*, which she could see through the inner curtains of her windows.

Baudu, troubled by the fixity of her gaze, wanted sometimes to draw the heavy curtains. But with an entreating gesture she stopped him. The monster had taken everything—her House and her daughter—and she was herself now following; her life had ebbed with the prosperity of the shop. When she was dying she employed her remaining strength in begging her husband to open the windows of her room. The weather was very mild, the sunlight lay full on the *Bonheur*, while the Baudus' shop was shivering in the shade. Madame Baudu lay with eyes fixed on this triumphant vision, and on the shining windows, behind which millions were made. Slowly the light faded in these sad eyes, and when they were extinguished in death they yet seemed to be gazing at the *Bonheur des Dames*.

Once again all the petty tradespeople in the *quartier* appeared at the funeral, the Vaupouille Brothers pale with the superhuman efforts they had made to pay their December notes, and troubled by the consciousness that though successful then, they could never do the like again. Bedoré and his sister had dragged themselves from sick beds to pay their respects to the Baudus. Deslignières had had a fit of apoplexy. Piot and Revoué dragged themselves along with hardly strength to move. And no one ventured to ask for those who were absent,—Quinette, and Mademoiselle Tatin, as well as many others, Robineau among them, who lay on his bed with his broken leg.

The new tradespeople were watched with interest, the perfumer, Grognot, the milliner, Madame Chadeuil,

and Lacassagne; the florist, and Naud, the shoemaker. Every one wondered how long they could stand it.

Behind the bier Baudu walked with the same weary step as at his daughter's funeral, while in the first carriage Bonnat's bright eyes and white, bushy brows could be seen.

Denise was very sad. For a fortnight she had had incessant anxiety and fatigue. She had been looking for a school for P  p  , and Jean's infatuation for the confectioner's niece had reached such a point that he had implored his sister to ask her hand in marriage. Then came the death of her aunt. These repeated catastrophes had entirely upset the young girl. She had another conversation with Mouret, one morning, when she heard Bonnat was driven from his home, and that Baudu was about to close his shop.

After this interview she went out with the hope of carrying some comfort to these two poor creatures.

She found Bonnat standing on the sidewalk in front of his house, from which he had been expelled the previous evening in consequence of an adroit man  uvre of the lawyer.

Mouret had bought up the notes of the umbrella dealer, and made his bankruptcy a matter of course. Then he bought the lease for five hundred francs, at the sale ordered by the syndic, so that the obstinate old man was obliged to allow the property, for which he had been offered a hundred thousand, to go for five hundred francs.

The architect, who came with his workmen, was compelled to ask the police to put Bonnat out. The

goods were sold, the rooms empty, and yet the old man sat in the corner where his bed had been, and no one cared to drive him away out of the last lingering pity in their hearts. The workmen began to pull the slates off the roof, the plastering fell, and yet he sat there with the daylight coming in over his head. But when the police entered he departed. The next morning, however, he took up his stand on the opposite side of the street, after spending the night in a boarding-house near.

"Monsieur Bonnat," said Denise gently.

He did not hear her; his flaming eyes were fixed on the workmen who, with pickaxes, were demolishing the front of the old house where he had lived. The interior was now visible,—the miserable little rooms and the dark stairs, where Heaven's light had not penetrated for two hundred years.

"Ah! is that you?" he asked, finally. "Look at the robbers."

She did not dare speak. She was deeply moved by the pitiful aspect of the old dwelling, and could not take her eyes from the mouldy stones that were falling. She could see the room she had occupied, and even the word "Ernestine," written with the flame of a candle in black and wavering letters; the recollection of the days of poverty and hunger she had spent there made her very pitiful toward the sorrows of others.

The workmen suddenly relinquished their plan of attack, and began to deal terrific blows at the base. The house tottered.

"If it would but fall and crush them all!" muttered Bonnat, in a savage voice.

A loud cracking sound was heard, the frightened workmen made their escape as quickly as possible. The walls had slowly spread, and only a few well directed blows were needed to finish the work of destruction, and now there lay on the ground simply a pile of rubbish.

"Good God!" cried the old man, as if the shock had torn out his entrails.

He stood with open mouth; he had never supposed the end would come so quickly. He looked at the *Bonheur des Dames*, now freed from the excrescence that dishonored it. It was the crushed fly, the last triumph over intolerable obstinacy.

A small crowd had gathered to watch the pulling down of this old house, expecting that some one would be killed in the process.

"Monsieur Bonnat," repeated Denise, leading him aside, "you know that you are not to be forgotten. Your needs will be provided for."

He drew himself up haughtily.

"I have no needs. You can say as much to those who have sent you. Tell them that Bonnat can work still, and that he will find work where he chooses. Upon my word, this is too much! The idea of being charitable to people, after robbing them in this way!"

She entreated him.

"I implore you, accept their kindness, do it for my sake."

But he shook his gray mane.

"No, no, you need say no more. Live and be happy, you are young, but do not try to prevent the old from thinking as they please."

He gazed once more at the piles of rubbish and then he walked away slowly and with difficulty. Denise watched him until he turned the corner of the *Place Gaillon*, and vanished.

The young girl did not move for a few minutes; then she entered her uncle's shop where she found him alone. The charwoman did not come except at night and in the morning to do a little cooking and help put up and take down the shutters, and Baudu spent hours alone in this place where no human being came to disturb him, and where if by some accident a customer wandered in, he could not find the goods for which she asked.

And then, in the silence and obscurity, he walked up and down with the same dragging, heavy step which his friends had first noticed the day of his daughter's funeral. It seemed as if he could not sit still, and walked in this way to lull his grief to sleep.

"Are you better, uncle?" asked Denise.

He stopped only for a minute and then resumed his steady march.

"Oh! I am well, quite well. Thank you."

She tried to say something consolatory but could find no words.

"You heard the noise? The house is down."

"Ah!" he answered, with an air of astonishment, "that was the sound I heard, I felt the ground tremble too. When I saw the workmen on the roof this morning, I closed my door."

He made a little weary gesture as if to imply that these things interested him no longer. Each time that he reached the desk in his promenade he looked at the empty bench, the bench that was worn and shabby, where his wife had sat for so many years and where his child had grown up.

And when he arrived at the other end of the shop, he looked at the shelves where the last pieces of woollens were slowly rotting away.

His business had vanished, those he loved were gone and he alone was left, with a broken heart and wounded pride. He lifted his eyes to the black ceiling, he listened to the silence which came out of the darkness of the little dining-room, the room he had loved in spite of the close smell that always hung about it. There was not a sound in the whole house except his own footsteps, which sounded as hollow as though he were walking on a tomb.

Then Denise approached the subject that had brought her there.

"Uncle," she said, "you cannot stay here, you must come to some determination."

He answered without stopping:

"Yes, I know that, but what would you have me do? I have tried to sell, but no one wants to buy; some morning I shall close the shop, and go away."

She knew that bankruptcy was not imminent. The creditors preferred to wait, they were unwilling to do anything in the presence of such desolation. When the creditors were paid, Uncle Baudu would be penniless.

"But what do you wish to do?" she asked, unwilling to leave the subject which served as an introduction to the offer she had come but was afraid to make.

"I do not know," he replied.

He had now changed the direction of his walk, he was going from the dining-room to the windows of the shop, and each time he reached these windows he glanced at the display of shabby goods to the triumphant façade of the *Bonheur des Dames*, but he had lost all strength for anger.

"Listen, uncle," said Denise, in an embarrassed sort of way, "there might be a place for you—" she stopped, gasped for breath and then began again. "Yes, I am authorized to offer you a place as inspector."

"Where?" asked Baudu.

"Opposite of course, with us, a salary of six thousand francs, and little do do."

He stood still in front of her, but instead of falling into a rage as she had feared, he became very pale. He seemed to have become resigned to everything and anything.

"Opposite, opposite," he murmured. "Do you wish me to enter the establishment opposite?"

Denise was profoundly moved by his manner. She recalled the long contest between the two shops, she saw again the funerals of Madame Baudu and Geneviève, she realized that her uncle's business had been crushed by the *Bonheur*. And the idea of her uncle entering the establishment opposite and walking about there in a white cravat caused her heart to swell with pity and revolt.

"Think a moment, Denise, my child. Would it be possible?" he said simply, folding his trembling hands as he spoke.

"No, no, dear uncle," she cried passionately. "It would be wrong. Forgive me, I beg of you."

He resumed his march, his footsteps again echoed through the sepulchral void of the house. And when she left him he did not cease this steady motion.

Denise passed another wretched night; she could not sleep. She had taken the measure of her power and found that she could do little even for her own people. She must continue to assist at the perpetual work of life which demands death as its end. She ceased to rebel, and accepted this great law of perpetual struggle, but her woman's heart ached sorely at the thought and sight of suffering humanity. Had she not for years been a slave to this machine; had it not ground her nearly to dust? Had she not been called upon to bear insults and wrongs? And now she trembled when she thought of the logic of events. Why was she, frail as she was, expected to have any control over this monster? Mouret had invented all this machinery to crush the world; he had covered the *quartier* with ruins; beggared some, killed others, and she loved him even for the grandeur of his self-assigned work, and she loved all the more in his excess of power, notwithstanding the tears she shed for the sorrow of the vanquished.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE *Rue du Dix-Decembre*, in all its newness and whiteness, lay gay under a February sun. Carriages were rolling through the flood of light that now penetrated the dark shadows of the old *Quartier Saint-Roch*; and between the *Rue de la Michodière* and the *Rue de Choiseul* there was almost a mob before the great façade of the *Bonheur des Dames* which was to be thrown open that day.

This new façade was certainly very imposing with its masses of white and gold. In order to keep its decorations subordinate to the goods displayed, the colors were very sombre. A dado of sea green marble, pillars of black marble,—their severity relieved by a judicious admixture of gold,—every thing else was plate glass windows that admitted all the light from the street. But as the stairs were mounted the colors became more brilliant; mosaics and a frieze of red and blue flowers alternated with marble slabs, on which was inscribed the names of different kinds of merchandize.

On the next floor between long mirrors, were the gilded arms of the manufacturing cities of France, and medallions of terra cotta on which were repeated the rich colors of the red and blue flowers.

And a curious crowd gathered before the great door which was also decorated with a profusion of mosaics

and surmounted by an allegorical group glittering with gold—of a woman beautifully dressed and caressed by cupids.

This Palace was a Temple raised to Fashion, and covered the old *quartier* with its shadow. The scar left on its side by the destruction of the Bonnat shop, was now so well healed, that it would have been impossible to find it. The four façades filled the four streets with their magnificence.

Baudu's shop was closed and looked like a tomb; passing carriages had bespattered it with mud; handbills and placards were pasted upon it, and among these, like a flag planted in a conquered country, was an immense yellow paper, announcing in letters two feet long the great sale at the *Bonheur des Dames*.

It was as if the Colossus, overwhelmed with shame and disgust at the black *quartier*, had turned its back upon it and the mud of its narrow streets, and presented its parvenu face to the sunshine and noise of new Paris.

From the early morning the crowd had been increasing. No shop had ever been so popular, or excited the interest of the public in the same degree. The *Bonheur* spent each year nearly six hundred thousand francs in advertisements and handbills. They sent out four hundred thousand catalogues, and cut up some hundred thousand francs' worth of stuff into samples.

To celebrate this opening day, foreign flags were flying from the roof, and standards painted with the arms of the cities of France, were exhibited on each floor.

The exposition of white goods was something extra-

ordinary, for nothing but white in different tones was to be seen. There were yards upon yards of curtains, mountains of handkerchiefs, and between delicate muslins were hung pictures of brides, communicants, or ladies in white ball dresses, all life-size and clothed in real silk and satins, with faces beaming with smiles.

The crowd at the *Bonheur* was greater than it might have been because of the recent destruction by fire of *The Quatre Saisons*, the great shop opened by Bouthemont, near the Opera, not more than three weeks before. He was fully insured, however, and the public shrugged their shoulders, saying he had made a good thing of it.

What a lucky fellow, they said, this Mouret was! All Paris saluted his star, and ran to pay their respects, while calculating the probable profits of his year's sales, added ~~to~~ by the sudden and forced disappearance of his rival in smoke.

Mouret had had a brief season of uneasiness, when he found that Madame Desforges had embarked in this enterprise, as he felt that he owed his future in some degree to her. Nor was he pleased that the dilettante financier, Baron Hartmann, should put money in both concerns.

He was also exasperated at a brilliant idea of Bouthemont's. This *bon vivant* had caused his shop to be blessed by the Curé of the Madeleine, followed by all his clergy, a most astonishing ceremony, which however, did not prevent the shop from being burned. Mouret, ever since he heard of this, had thought of having the Archbishop to perform the same ceremony at the *Bonheur*.

The clock struck three; this was always the most crowded hour of the day; thousands of customers were in the *Bonheur*, while outside, long rows of carriages stretched from one end to the other of the *Rue du Dix-Décembre*. Horses champed their bits and pawed the ground, as they were held back by their drivers. Madame de Boves, accompanied by Blanche, stood looking with Madame Guibal, at a display of robes.

"Look at these linen robes," she said, "for nineteen francs, seventy-five centimes."

These costumes were arranged in such a way in their square boxes, that only the trimmings could be seen, and in the corner of each box was an engraving showing the suit made up and worn by a young person, with the air of a princess.

"They are worth no more!" murmured Madame Guibal. "They are flimsy things, as you would find out if you took them in your hand."

These two ladies were now quite intimate. Monsieur de Boves was confined to the house with an attack of gout. Madame de Boves found that if she closed her eyes to what was going on it was money in her pocket, as her husband, feeling the need of tolerance himself, was unusually indulgent.

"Let us go in," resumed Madame Guibal. "We must, of course, see their exposition. Did not your son-in-law say he would meet you there?"

Madame de Boves did not reply. She was watching the carriages as they rolled up and deposited new customers.

"Yes," said Blanche in her low voice. "Paul was to meet us about five o'clock in the reading-room."

They had been married about a month, and Vallegnose after a three weeks' vacation passed at the south, had returned to his post.

The young wife had become singularly like her mother.

"Ah! there is Madame Desforages," cried the Countess, looking at a *coupé*.

"Impossible!" murmured Madame Guibal, "after all these stories. She must be crying her eyes out over the fire at the *Quatre Saisons*."

It was Henriette nevertheless. She perceived these ladies and advanced with an air of gayety, concealing her defeat under her easy society air.

"Yes it is I. I wanted to see for myself. It is always better, is it not? Oh! we are excellent friends, Monsieur Mouret and I, although at one time he was perfectly furious with me when he found that I was interested in a rival house. But there is one thing that I will never forgive, and that is his making that marriage between Joseph and my *protégée*, Mademoiselle de Fontenailles."

"You don't mean it!" cried Madame de Boves. "How horrible!"

"Yes, my dear, and only to put his heel on us! I know him. It is his way of saying that girls in our circle are only fit to marry shop boys."

She was quite animated. The four ladies stood on the sidewalk unmindful of the pushes they received.

the crowd, however, imperceptibly swept them on,

and they passed through the door almost without knowing it. Some one asked for Madame Marly, and one of the ladies replied that poor Monsieur Marly had been carried to an insane asylum. He raved all the time about jewels and gold and silver.

"Poor man!" said Madame Guibal, "he always looked so shabby. And his wife?"

"She is living off an uncle at present," answered Henriette. "A good old man who has taken her to live with him. But we shall probably see her here to-day."

A great surprise awaited these ladies. Before them extended the shop—the largest in the world as the advertisements stated. The central gallery now ran from one end to the other of the whole building, opening on the *Rue du Dix-Decembre* and on the *Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin*; while on the right and the left, stretched the gallery Monsigny, and the gallery *Michodière*, both narrower than the central gallery.

The interior arrangements had all been changed. The silks were in the centre and the gloves at the further end.

There were now fifty different Departments; several were new and opened that day, and the staff of the House now numbered three thousand and forty-five persons.

The ladies saw nothing but white goods, piled like snow-drifts and glittering like glaciers, or soft and creamy like lamb's wool.

There were white velvets and white silks, foulards and moires. There were white *couvre pieds* floating like banners in a church, long scarfs of *guipure*, and

laces airy as butterflies' wings, or delicate and frail like the light mist that floats beneath a summer sky.

"Wonderful! Original!" cried these ladies over and over again. "Mouret has never done anything more extraordinary; it is an absolute stroke of genius, this arrangement of all these different tones of white."

The shop was crowded from the lower floor to the upper. And among all this whiteness the people looked black like skaters on a Polish lake in December.

The heat was excessive, and the bright colors on the ceiling looked like the sunlight shining on Alpine peaks.

"Let us move on," said Madame de Boves. "We can't stay here."

Inspector Jouve had been watching her ever since she entered. Whenever she turned she met him, and when these ladies passed on he kept at some little distance behind them.

"Look!" cried Madame Guibal, stopping at the first cashier's desk, "that is a good idea. See those violets."

She spoke of a new caprice of the *Bonheur*, an idea of Mouret's which made much talk in the newspapers; little bouquets of white violets bought by the thousand at Nice, and distributed to every customer. Boys in livery stationed near each cashier, under the superintendency of an inspector, distributed them. And by degrees the whole shop was filled with the delicious odor of the flowers that each woman bore on her breast.

"Yes," murmured Madame Desforges, "it is a very good idea."

But just as these ladies were speaking they heard two salesmen laughing about the violets. A tall thin fellow expressed his astonishment that the manager should do all this merely because he was going to marry his forewoman. While another said that no one knew positively when the marriage would take place, but that was the reason, all the same, that the flowers were bought.

"What is that they are saying?" asked Madame de Boves. "Is Monsieur Mouret to be married then?"

"It is the first I have heard of it," answered Henriette with an air of indifference, "but I felt very sure it would end in that way."

The Countess glanced at her friend. They both now understood why Henriette had come to the *Bonheur des Dames* in spite of the rupture. She had undoubtedly yielded to the invincible desire to see and to suffer.

"I will stay with you," said Madame de Guibal to Henriette, for her curiosity was on the *qui vive*. "We can meet Madame de Boves in the reading-room."

"Very good," said that lady. "I have something to do on the next floor first. Come Blanche."

And she mounted the stairs, while Inspector Jouve who still hovered near her, went on to the next flight in order not to attract her attention.

The two ladies were soon lost in the crowd.

At all the counters, in spite of the crowd of customers, the clerks talked of nothing but their employer and his love affair. This affair which for months had occupied the attention of every one in the *Bonheur*,

seemed now to have come to a crisis. It was said that the young girl had the previous evening given notice that she must leave the establishment, in spite of Mouret's entreaties, alleging that she required rest.

There was a good deal of vehement discussion; would she go? Would she stay? and many a small bet was made, to be paid the following Sunday, while others laid a wager of a breakfast on the ultimate marriage; others again declared that they were not going to bet their money on such follies; the young lady to be sure was strong in her refusal, and she was adored, but Monsieur Mouret on his side was also strong in his wealth and love of ease; he enjoyed the freedom of being a widower, and he would not be easy to catch. One and all, however, agreed that this little saleswoman had managed the whole thing with unexampled skill, and that she was now playing her last card, "marry me, or I leave."

Denise, in the meantime was thinking little of all this. She had made no such calculations as she was credited with, and her decision arose entirely from the false judgment that had been formed of her acts, of which she was constantly hearing. She had not been ambitious, shrewd or calculating; and was the first to be astonished that her employer could love her.

She was disturbed too, to find that this last step of leaving the *Bonheur* was so misjudged. It was in her opinion perfectly natural and she could not see how she could do otherwise. She had become excessively nervous, and almost ill from the constant gossip which

she felt to be going on around her, and preferred to go away, rather than run any risk. She had suddenly conceived the fear that she might yield and then regret it to the last day of her life.

If these were wise tactics she did not know it, and asked herself in despair what she should do in order to put an end to the idea that she was a husband-hunter.

The idea of a marriage irritated her now, and she was more than ever determined to say no; in case Mouret should carry his folly to extreme lengths, she should be the only one to suffer. The idea of the impending separation brought tears to her eyes, but she said to herself over and over again, with her usual calm courage, that she would have neither rest nor happiness if she should act otherwise.

When Mouret received her resignation, he was silent and cold in the effort he made to contain himself. Then he answered quietly, that he wished her to take a week for reflection before she committed such an act of folly. At the end of the week when she returned to the subject, and expressed her wish to leave after the great opening, he was equally quiet. He affected to reason with her; she would never find such a position elsewhere as she had with him. Had she any situation in view? If so, he was quite ready to offer her any advantage, that she hoped to obtain elsewhere.

And when Denise replied that she had looked for no situation because she required a month's rest at Valognes, he asked why she could not, at the expiration of that time, return to the *Bonheur*, if it we:

only the care of her health that caused her to leave it.

She did not reply, for these questions distressed her. He at once inferred from this silence that she was going to a lover, or a husband, for had she not confessed to him that she loved some one? This avowal had stung him like an arrow at the time he heard it, and he had never for a moment forgotten it. It was plain that this man was now about to marry her, and this would explain her obstinacy.

When this idea occurred to him, he simply said in an icy voice, that of course if she would not give him the real reasons for her departure, he would make no further effort to detain her. This hard manner, this conversation without anger or heat, upset her more than the violent scene she had dreaded.

During the week that Denise remained in the *Bonheur* after this conversation, Mouret's rigid coldness never changed. When he passed through the different rooms, and met her, he pretended not to see her. He had never seemed more indifferent or more absorbed in his business, and it was at this time, that the number of bets was increased, although only a few of the most courageous ventured to offer the wager of a breakfast on the wedding.

But under all this coldness, so foreign to his nature, Mouret concealed a frightful state of indecision and suffering. His head throbbed with pain; his eyes were bloodshot, and his dreams were terrible. He raved at himself, and the powerlessness of all his wealth.

One idea however, had taken root in his brain. After the death of Madame Hédouin, he had sworn never to marry again. The first impulse to his fortune had been given by a woman, and he was determined to increase it through women.

With him as with Bourdoucle, it was a superstition, that the manager of a great establishment like the *Bonheur* should have no wife if he desired to retain his supremacy over his customers, who were women as a rule.

He resisted the invincible logic of events, preferring to die rather than yield. He had occasional spasms of anger against Denise, feeling sure that she would be the master spirit the day he married her. Then he reasoned with himself in regard to this repugnance. She was so gentle and sensible, that he could allow himself to be led by her without fear. Twenty times each day the combat was repeated in his harassed soul. He ended by losing his reason in some degree, when he remembered that even if he made that last submission it might be useless, for she would say no — always no, if she loved another.

The morning of the great opening there was nothing decided, and Denise was to leave the next day.

When Bourdoucle entered Mouret's private room as was his usual custom about three o'clock, he found him with his elbows on his desk and his hands over his eyes, so absorbed in thought that he did not hear the door open. Mouret looked up when his friend touched him on the shoulder with such evident emotion that Bourdoucle extended his hand involuntari

There was a firm and encouraging grasp exchanged between these two men who had fought so many commercial battles together.

For the last month Bourdoucle's position had greatly changed. He had yielded to the influence of Denise, and even did his best to incline the thoughts of Mouret to the marriage. He did this unquestionably, in order not to be swept off his feet by a force which he had come to recognize as superior to his own; but still more because his own ambition was aroused, and he hoped to benefit by the change, and acquire an ascendancy over Mouret, before whom he had so long bent the knee.

This was the rule of the house—something in the air affected every one in the same way. Each proposed to rise by pulling down another in this battle for existence. Hitherto Bourdoucle had held himself aloof from this sort of thing, but if Mouret was going to be silly and childish, and lose all his *prestige* with his fair customers, he himself would reap such advantage from it as he could. Why should he attempt to influence Mouret against this woman? Why did he not let him take his way, and when absorbed in the joys of his new marriage he, Bourdoucle, would quietly walk in and take his place. It was therefore, with something like a farewell that he pressed the hand of his old friend, saying:

"Come! come! why don't you marry her, and have done with it?"

Mouret was ashamed of his discouragement. He rose hastily and shook his head:

"No! no! it is too stupid. Come, we must go through the shop; we shall have a magnificent day, I am sure."

The crowd was immense, and as the two men made their way through it, Bourdouce glanced at his friend and associate, from time to time, a little disturbed at this manifestation of energy.

In the Department where Denise was forewoman, there was a crowd of young mothers with their children. There, as elsewhere, everything that day was white—little coats of white cloth and flannel, dresses of cashmere, piqué, and nansook. In the centre of the room although far in advance of the season, was a display of costumes for the first Communion. Robes and veils of clear white muslin, white satin slippers—everything crisp and fresh.

Madame Bourdelais sat with her three children, lecturing the youngest because he resisted when Denise attempted to try on him a little jacket of mousseline delaine.

"Stand still! Do you not think, Mademoiselle, that it is a little tight for him?" And with her practical judgment she examined the cut and the sewing.

"No," she continued, "it will do very well; but it is a great deal of trouble to dress children. Now a cloak for this little girl, if you please."

Denise was obliged that day to act as saleswoman, so great was the crowd. She turned to look for the cloak when she uttered a little cry of surprise.

"What! Is it you?" she exclaimed.

Her brother Jean with both hands grasping a bundle, stood before her.

He had been married just a week, and on Saturday his wife, a pretty brunette, had spent a long time at the *Bonheur* making purchases. The happy pair were to accompany Denise to Valognes and enjoy a real honeymoon there.

"Thérèse has forgotten a quantity of things, and wants half of those changed that she bought here Saturday, and as she was in great haste, she begged me to bring the bundle myself. I will tell you about the things—"

But she interrupted him, on seeing Pépé.

"And Pépé, too!" she said. "How about his school?"

"To tell the truth," said Jean, "I had not the courage to send him back yesterday, but he will go to-night. The poor child is sad enough at the idea of being shut up in Paris, while we are amusing ourselves at Valognes."

Denise smiled in spite of her anxiety. She handed Madame Bourdelais over to one of the saleswomen, and then led the children, as she continued to call them, into a quiet corner. Pépé at twelve was taller than she, a very handsome boy in his collegiate tunic, while Jean, square shouldered and also tall, had lost none of his feminine beauty; he wore his fair hair long, like an artist. She slender, and not much bigger, as she herself said, than a sparrow, preserved all her gentle authority over them, treating them like children who must be watched over and cared for, buttoning up Jean's overcoat to make him look a little more tidy, and asking Pépé if he had a clean handkerchief.

This day she lectured the lad a little.

"Be reasonable, dear," she said. "Your studies must not be interrupted, you know. I will take you away in the vacation. Do you want anything? Perhaps you would like a little money to use while I am away?"

Then turning toward the other brother, she said:

"It is your fault. You have made him believe that we are going away only to amuse ourselves. Try and have more sense."

She had given the oldest four thousand francs, half of her savings, in order that he could marry. The child was a heavy bill of expense at college. In short, all her money went to them now, as it had always done. They were her only reason for living and working, and she swore to herself once more, that she would never marry.

"Now then," said Jean, "in the first place there is that brown paletot Thérèse bought—"

But he stopped short, and Denise turning to see what intimidated him, perceived Mouret standing just behind them all. He had been watching her for some time, interested in her motherly air toward the two tall young fellows, scolding them, caressing them, and turning them round like the babies she had just left.

Bourdoucle, standing a little apart, lost nothing of this scene, although he pretended not to see it.

"These are your brothers, I believe?" said Mouret, after a long silence.

His voice was as cold, his manner as rigid, as it had been of late.

Denise made an effort to remain equally cold and unmoved. Her smile faded away, and she replied:

"Yes, sir. The oldest is married, and his wife sends him to me to make some purchases."

Mouret stood still, looking at them. Finally he said:

"The youngest has grown enormously. I remember him perfectly. I have never forgotten that evening in the Tuileries, when I saw him with you."

And his voice trembled slightly. She turned away quickly, and stooping, feigned to arrange Pépé's belt. The two brothers colored deeply, and smiled at their sister's employer.

"They are very much like you," he said.

"Oh! no," she cried. "They are far better looking than I!"

He, for a moment, seemed to be comparing their faces. But his strength was gone. How she loved them! He walked away a few steps—then returning, said in her ear:

"Come to my office after the day is over. I have something to say to you before you go."

Then Mouret went away, and continued his inspection. This appointment he had just made, revived all his irritation. Why had he yielded to this sudden impulse, when he saw her with her brothers? He asked himself if he were not going mad, since he had not strength enough to hold to a determination. However, he would say nothing but farewell to her.

Bourdoucle, who had again joined him, seemed less uneasy, but equally watchful.

Denise, in the meantime, had returned to Madame Bourdelais.

"Did you find a cloak?" she asked.

"Yes—just what I wanted—enough for to-day; these children will ruin me!"

Finding herself at leisure now, Denise was able to listen to Jean's explanations, and then went with him to the different counters where alone he would certainly have lost his head. First there was the brown paletot that Thérèse, on reflection, wished to change for a white one of the same form, cut and size, and Denise, taking the package, went with Jean to the cloak room, followed by Pépé.

Here they found garments for spring, in silks and woollens, in white and pale tints. Almost all the saleswomen were new. Clara had disappeared, and of this disappearance contradictory tales were told.

As to Marguérite, she was about going away to take the management of the little shop at Grenoble, where her cousin was waiting for her.

Madame Aurélie, however, was there, with her black silk dress as tightly buttoned as usual, and her imperial profile looking as if moulded in yellow wax. The misconduct of her son Albert had seriously impaired her finances, otherwise she would have retired to the country, but she was harassed by the fear that the son would end by devouring the beloved property of Rigolles. Bourdoucle watched Madame Aurélie with an air of discontent. "Why does not this woman have tact enough to retire?" he asked himself. "She is too old to rule here!"

Her hour had sounded, that was plain enough.

"Ah! is that you?" asked Madame Aurélie, when she saw Denise. "You wish to change that paletot? Of course. Ah! these are your brothers? They are men now."

In spite of her excessive pride the forewoman would have gone down on her knees to Denise, to win her favor. There had been much talk that day about the girl's departure, which made Madame Aurélie fairly ill, for she had relied on the protection of the former saleswoman. She dropped her voice: "It is said that you are about to leave us. It can't be possible."

"It is true," answered the young girl.

Marguérite was listening. Since the time of her marriage had been fixed, she had gone about with a most discontented air. She now approached.

"And you are quite right," she said. "Preserve your self-respect at all costs. I will take this opportunity to say good-bye to you, my dear."

Customers now appeared. Madame Aurélie peremptorily requested her saleswoman to attend to them. Then as Denise took up the paletot to make the change, the forewoman looked quite shocked, and called another assistant.

This was one of the innovations made by the young girl's suggestion to Mouret, for the saleswomen were often greatly fatigued by carrying about the purchases made by their customers.

"Accompany this young lady," said the forewoman, as she gave her the coat, and then turning to Denise, she said:

"Pray reconsider your determination. We are all very unhappy about it."

Jean and Pépé, who stood looking with smiling faces on this perpetual crowd of women, now followed their sister, who now went to the *lingerie* Department in search of six chemises like those Thérèse had purchased the Saturday before. But the crowd made it almost impossible to get into this room.

Madame Bontarel, who had again come up from the south, but this time with her husband and her daughter, had been all day in the shop purchasing a trousseau for this same daughter, who was to be married. The father had to be consulted at every step, and little or nothing had been accomplished. Finally the whole family stopped at the *lingerie* counter, and while the daughter was absorbed in a profound study of chemises, the mother disappeared in quest of corsets.

Monsieur Bontarel, a great red faced man, left his daughter to search for his wife, and found that lady in a fitting room, outside the door of which he was politely asked to take a seat. These fitting-rooms were narrow cells, shut in by ground glass—from an exaggerated idea of propriety entertained by the managers—and no men, not even husbands, could enter them—consequently it was no unusual thing to see a number of men impatiently waiting outside.

When this was explained to Monsieur Bontarel, he lost his temper entirely, and declared that he wanted his wife, where she could go he could go too, and he would stand no such nonsense. He seemed to think the matter so extraordinary, and gave such broad hints

as to what he considered the impropriety, that the crowd standing about were convulsed with laughter.

Then Denise and her brothers appeared. All the white garments worn by women were displayed in a succession of rooms classified at different counters, long corsets and short corsets, corsets of silk, satin and coultille were displayed on headless forms, and tournures and hoops were suspended from above.

In the next room were dressing sacques, and peignoirs of linen and nansook, trimmed with lace, suggesting long idle days after nights of tenderness.

There were white skirts of all lengths, the short ones only to the knee, the walking skirt and the trained skirt with its full *balayeuse*.

There were chemises and night-dresses of simple percale, of batiste and Irish linen.

Then came another room where baby linen was exhibited, masses of lace and embroidery, christening robes and tiny caps, cashmere cloaks and sacques, trimmed with soft white swan's down.

Jean was fascinated by all he saw, but still anxiously hurried his sister on, that his business might be accomplished.

Pauline ran to meet Denise as soon as she saw her. And before hearing what was wanted, she began to speak in great agitation in regard to the reports which were flying about the shop. In her own Department she said two of the saleswomen had nearly come to blows in regard to the matter.

"You are not going away!" cried Pauline, almost with tears. "What would become of me in that case?"

And when Denise said she was going the next day, she answered:

"No, no, you may think so, but I know to the contrary. Now that I have a baby I rely on your giving me the position of 'second,' Baugh relies on it too."

She smiled with an air of conviction, as she gave Jean the six chemises which he had come to purchase; and Jean having said that he wanted handkerchiefs, she called an assistant to take the chemises and the paletot brought to her counter by one of the women in the cloak room.

The girl who presented herself in reply to the summons was Mademoiselle de Fontenailles, who had recently married Joseph.

She had just obtained as an especial favor, this position of assistant, which was about the same as that of a servant, and wore a large black blouse marked on the shoulder with a letter worked in yellow wool.

"Follow Mademoiselle," said Pauline.

Then turning back to Denise, she whispered:

"I am 'second,' am I not?"

Denise promised laughingly, only to carry out the joke, and then she went away with Pépé and Jean, Mademoiselle de Fontenailles following them meekly with the bundles.

In the *rez de chaussée* they saw Liénard, who had been vainly summoned over and over again to Angus by his father. He stood talking with Mignol, who never hesitated to enter the *Bonheur* in the most impudent manner, whenever the whim seized him.

They were probably talking of Denise, for they started when she appeared, and bowed low; evidently they were by no means sure of what she would be the next day. All the clerks bowed as she passed and then the bets were resumed.

She entered the gallery where the handkerchiefs were to be found; there she saw all sorts of white cotton goods, muslins, calicos, percales, nansooks, and then came the linen in enormous piles, like stone cubes. Stout linens, and delicate ones, of all widths and qualities, bleached and unbleached. Then came table linen and napkins, sheets, towels and aprons.

Here again, Denise was saluted with profound respect, and Baugh rushed forward with a smile to greet her.

Then after crossing a room where bedspreads were displayed like banners hanging on the wall, they reached the counter where the handkerchiefs were arranged in the most ingenious style. There were high white pyramids and châteaux all built of handkerchiefs, of Irish linen, linen cambric, and China silk, trimmed with lace or embroidered, an infinite variety of dainty fabrics.

"Did you say one dozen?" asked Denise of her brother.

"Yes, like this in this bundle," and he showed her a handkerchief which his wife had sent as a sample.

Jean and P  p   had not left their sister, they pressed almost as closely to her side as on the day they had entered Paris after their journey from Valognes. This vast shop filled them with a sensation of vague alarm,

and they felt that they must put themselves under the protection of their little mother once again. Every one looked at these young people with pleased interest, the two tall good looking young fellows and the grave, slender girl.

But while Denise was looking for a salesman to wait on them, there was a *rencontre*. Mouret and Bourdoucle entered the gallery, and as the former stopped short before the young girl without, however, addressing a word to her, Madame Desforges and Madame Guibal passed; Henriette repressed the thrill that quivered through all her nerves, she looked at Mouret and then at Denise. They returned the glance; this was the mute ending, the ordinary finale to the great dramas of the heart—a glance exchanged in a jostling crowd! Mouret moved on, and Denise disappeared at the further end of the room still accompanied by her brothers. Henriette, recognizing Mademoiselle de Fontenailles in the assistant who followed with the yellow cipher on her shoulder and her dull expressionless face, turned to Madame Guibal and said in an irritated voice:

"Now see what that man has done! Is it not awful? A Marquise! And he forces her to follow about like a dog, these creatures he has picked up in the gutter!"

She struggled for composure, and then she added in an indifferent way:

"Come, let us go into the silk room."

The silk room was as unique in its appearance as was the rest of the establishment that day. Pieces of velvet were hung between the columns, and against

this background, were displayed every tint of white in Siciliennes, *poults de soie*, foulards and surahs.

Favier was measuring off some white foulard for the "*jolie dame*," the elegant blonde who was an *habituée* of the House, and whom the salesmen knew only by this name, in spite of all the years she had been coming there. They knew nothing of her life, her place of residence, not even her name.

The fact was, that no one made an effort to know, they were all satisfied to indulge in numerous suppositions when she made her appearance, but they soon forgot her after deciding that she had grown thin, or was a trifle stouter, or looked as if she had been up late the night before.

This day she seemed especially gay, and when Favier returned from the cashier's desk where he had accompanied her, he communicated his reflections to Hutten.

"Perhaps she means to marry again—"

"Is she a widow?" asked Hutten.

"I don't know. Only, you remember she was in mourning once when she came here. She may have been making money on the Bourse, though."

Hutten was very thoughtful. He had had a somewhat stormy discussion with the managers, the previous evening; he felt that his days at the *Bonheur* were few, and that he would certainly receive his dismissal as soon as the present busy season was over. He knew, too, that this dismissal was the logical result of the manœuvres of those below him, of Favier, who had already received the promise of being made "*pre-*"

mier," and Hutten, who had learned much wisdom, instead of being tempted to slap the face of his old comrade, regarded him with a certain admiration and respect.

"You know, of course," said Favier, "that she remains. Mouret has just been making eyes at her, and I am willing to bet another bottle of champagne on it."

He was speaking of Denise. From one counter to the other gossip flew faster and faster. The silk room was in a turmoil.

Hutten grumbled "that this creature"—he meant Denise—"had ruined him with the managers," and gradually lashed himself into a state of fury. But suddenly he began to smile; he had seen Madame Desforges and Madame Guibal slowly crossing the room. He greeted them with smiles.

"What can I show you, Madame?" he asked.

"Nothing, thank you," answered Henriette. "I have only come in to look about from mere curiosity."

Hutten, however, did not give up his point; when he accosted her, it was with a sudden determination and plan.

He began to talk with Henriette; he said he had had enough of the *Bonheur* and meant to leave it. His conscience would not permit him to remain and witness such performances as were there of daily occurrence.

She listened to him with delight, and thinking she was inveigling him from the *Bonheur*, she offered him a position at the head of the silk Department when the *Quatre Saisons* was again in running order.

The affair was concluded, though the whispered conversation still continued, while Madame Guibal looked about.

"May I offer you one of these bunches of violets?" said Hutten, in a lower voice, turning to a table where were a half-dozen of these little bouquets which he had procured from one of the cashiers to dispense himself as gifts.

"By no means," cried Henriette, recoiling. "I do not care to look as if I belonged to the bridal party!"

They understood each other, and separated with a mutual glance of comprehension.

As Madame Desforges turned to look for Madame Guibal, she uttered an exclamation on seeing her with Madame Marly. This lady had been for two hours in the *Bonheur*, accompanied by her daughter, Valentine, and had been spending money right and left in one of her usual spasms of extravagance. She had seen everything that was to be seen in the whole establishment, even the decoration consisting of letters that spelled the *Bonheur des Dames*—letters some yards long, made of white stockings on a background of red stockings. She had become immensely excited over the new Departments; she had visited them all in succession, and made one purchase or more in each. She had spent an hour in the milliners' room; taking a seat on the sofa, she had ordered hat after hat to be taken from the wardrobes, and had tried on all those that were exhibited on the mushroom-like stands. Then she went down to the shoe Department, where she died of longing for slippers trimmed with swans-

down, and white satin boots with high Louis Quinze heels.

"Oh! my dear," she stammered, "they have the most marvellous hats. I selected one for myself and Valentine. And the shoes!"

"Yes," interposed the young girl with perfect self-possession. "There are boots at twenty francs fifty, which are certainly very wonderful."

"How is Monsieur Marly?" asked Madame Des-forges.

"He is pretty well," answered Madame Marly, startled at this abrupt question, which cast a sudden gloom over her mad thirst for expenditure. "He is still at the asylum. My uncle went to see him this morning."

She interrupted herself with an expression of admiration at the spectacle of the new Department of flowers and feathers. In the centre in the full blaze of the sun and the light coming through the unshaded windows, stood an enormous tree covered with white blossoms; turf was at its base, among which were beds of hyacinths, lilies of the valley and marguerites. Above were long sprays of creamy roses, huge white peonies, dashed with carmine, white chrysanthemums, starred with yellow.

Above again were mystic white lilies, branches of apple blossoms and of white lilacs, and at the very top clusters of white ostrich plumes and marabout feathers, that looked as if they were the breath of these white flowers.

There were clusters and wreaths of orange blossoms. There were metallic flowers, glittering steel and silvery

wheat. Among the delicate foliage, and drinking the dew drops, figured by shining glue, there were many tinted birds for hats, ruby-throated and emerald throated humming birds and purple Tangaras with black tails.

"I bought some of those apple blossoms," said Madame Marly. "Are they not exquisite? And Valentine, look at that tiny bird, I must have it!"

Madame Guibal, who was not interested either in the apple blossoms or the birds, said:

"Well, we will leave you to continue your purchases. We are going up-stairs."

"No, no, wait for me," said the other. "I am going too. The perfumery is up-stairs, and I want to see that."

This new Department was next to the reading-room. Madame Desforges to avoid the stairs spoke of the elevator, but found that there was such a crowd standing at the door that they were obliged to relinquish the idea.

They ascended the stairs, and at the top they perceived the odors from the perfumery Department. There was an especial soap now introduced by the *Bonheur*. In glass cases were displayed pomades and powders, toilet waters and perfumes, while the combs and brushes, scissors and pocket-flasks occupied an entire armoire.

In the centre of the room was a silver fountain, a shepherdess standing on a mossy bank, through which ran a stream of violet water, dropping with a musical sound into a metal basin. A most exquisite scent, like fresh flowers, was apparent, and the ladies as they

passed, stopped and dipped their handkerchiefs into this slender stream.

"Now then," said Madame Marly, when she had purchased dentifrices, lotions and cosmetics. "Now then, I have done. Shall we find Madame de Boves?"

But the ladies lingered again before the Exposition of Japanese goods. This Department had grown immensely since Mouret had risked the one little table covered with inexpensive trifles. Few of the Departments had made such a modest beginning, and now he displayed old ivories, old bronzes and old lacquer. He made fifteen hundred thousand francs in this Department each year, and sent purchasers to the extreme East, where in obedience to his orders temples and palaces were ransacked.

Two new Departments had been opened in December. A Department for books and another for children's toys, both of which were destined to an immense success.

Only four years, and the Japanese room had proved an enormous attraction to artistic Paris.

This time Madame Desforges herself, in spite of the bitterness which had induced her to swear that she would buy nothing that day, succumbed before an ivory carving of exquisite fineness.

"Send it for me," she said quickly, "to the next cashier's desk. Ninety francs, is it not?"

And seeing Madame Marly and her daughter absorbed in a study of porcelains, she said, as she and Madame Guibal walked away: "You will find us the reading-room. I really must sit down awhile."

But even in the reading-room these ladies were compelled to stand, for every chair was taken around the great table covered with newspapers. Stout men were comfortably reading, and had not the smallest intention of yielding their places. Several women were writing, bending low over their paper as if to conceal the words with the flowers on their hats. Madame de Boves, however, was not to be seen, and Henriette was becoming very impatient when she perceived Vallegnose, who was also looking for his mother-in-law.

He bowed low, and said:

"I believe they are still hovering over the lace. They cannot tear themselves away. I will go and see."

And gallantly providing the ladies with chairs, he went in pursuit of his mother-in-law.

The crush in the lace room was something terrific. The exhibition here was most tempting. The priceless exquisite fabrics were calculated to drive a woman crazy. The room looked like a white chapel. Tulle and guipures fell from above and formed a white misty sky, such as we see sometimes at dawn. Around the columns were wreathed Valenciennes and Malines, suggesting the frilled skirts of a danseuse. There were piles of Spanish blonde lying on the counter, Brussels appliqué with its large flowers on a fine net, Point d'Aiguille and Point de Venise, Point d'Alençon and Brussels laces.

Madame de Boves, after walking about a long time with her daughter, fingering the laces whenever she could, finally took a seat in front of Deloche, and bade him show her some Point d'Alençon. At first he

brought out imitation, but she wished to see the real, and was not content with narrow at three hundred francs per yard; she wanted to look at flounces for a thousand, handkerchiefs and fans at seven or eight hundred. Very soon the counter was covered with a fortune.

In a corner, not far off, stood Inspector Jouve, who had never taken his eyes off Madame Boves, notwithstanding the indolent lounging air she had adopted.

"And have you any *berthes* in Point d'Aiguille?" asked the Countess, of Deloche. "Will you find out?"

The clerk, whose attention she had been absorbing for twenty minutes, dared not resist, so much was he impressed by her grand air and her matronly beauty. Nevertheless he hesitated, for the salesmen were not allowed to bring out so much of their precious laces at a time, and only the previous week some ten yards of Malines had been stolen from him. But he finally yielded, and deserted the mass of Point d'Alençon for one moment, to take from a case just behind him the *berthes* which had been asked for.

"Look mamma," said Blanche, who was turning over a box of low-priced Valenciennes, "this would be good for pillow covers."

Madame de Boves did not reply, and the daughter, turning her placid face toward the mother, saw her with her hands among the laces, and quietly pushing up her sleeve one of the flounces of *Point d'Alençon*. Blanche did not seem in the least surprised, but was moving closer to her mother as by an instinctive desire to conceal her, when Inspector Jouve suddenly ?

peared between them. He stooped over the lady and said, in the most polite of tones :

"Madame, have the goodness to follow me."

She looked up in surprise. "And why?" she asked, haughtily.

"Have the goodness to follow me," repeated the inspector, in the same low tone.

She glanced around, with a face drawn by anguish; then resigning herself, she calmly rose and accompanied him with the dignity and grace of a queen who deigns to confide herself to the ministrations of an aide-de-camp.

Not one single person in the whole crowd had noticed this brief scene.

Deloche, returning to the counter with the *berthes*, watched Jouve with open mouth. What! She too! That beautiful lady! Was she to be searched? And Blanche, with whom no one interfered, followed her mother at some little distance, livid and ashamed, divided between her sense of duty and determination not to desert her mother, and terror lest she should be detained with her. She saw her mother enter Bourdouce's private office, and then contented herself with keeping very near the door.

Bourdouce happened to be within at that very moment. It was his duty, usually, to decide on thefts like these, committed by persons of good social position. Some time before, Jouve had confided to Bourdouce his doubts in regard to Madame de Boves; the latter, therefore, was not surprised when the inspector appeared before him, and in a few brief words made him understand what had taken place. So many

extraordinary things had taken place, that Bourdoucle said he was never surprised at anything which a woman's passion for dress led her to do. As he was perfectly well aware of Mouret's social acquaintance with her, he showed her the greatest courtesy.

"Madame, we are ready to excuse these moments of weakness," he said. "I beg you, however, to reflect where such forgetfulness will lead you. If any other person had seen you secrete these laces—"

She interrupted him indignantly.

She a thief! For whom did he take her? She was the Countess de Boves; her husband was Inspector-General.

"I know—I know, Madame," answered Bourdoucle, soothingly, "I have the honor of knowing you. But first let me beg you to surrender the lace you have taken."

She became still more indignant; she would not permit him to speak. Tears of insulted innocence stood in her eyes.

Any one but himself would have wavered in his conviction, and would have feared that some deplorable mistake had been made, for she threatened to address herself to the courts to avenge such an insult.

"Take care, sir, my husband will go to the Minister."

"You are no more reasonable than the others," cried Bourdoucle, out of patience. "You must be searched, that is all that can be done."

Not even then did she waver.

"Very good," she said, with the most magnificent assurance, "but let me warn you that your House is running a great risk."

Jouve went for two of the saleswomen at the corset counter. When he returned, he told Bourdoucle that the lady's daughter was just outside the door. Must she come in too? He had not seen her take anything, he added. Bourdoucle, who was always cautious and judicious, said that it would be better not to allow her to enter. A mother should not be made to blush before her daughter.

The two men then withdrew into another room, when the saleswomen searched the Countess, and even took off her dress. Besides the flounces of Point d'Alençon, twelve metres at a thousand francs each, hidden in the large sleeve of her mantle, they found in her bosom a handkerchief and a fan and a cravat, all amounting to some fourteen thousand francs.

For a year Madame de Boves had been stealing in this way—carried away by an irresistible impulse. She forgot all considerations of prudence and imperilled her name, her pride, and the high position of her husband. Now that the latter allowed her to take what money she pleased from his desk, she stole with her purse full, from the mere love of stealing. Her appetite for luxury had sprung into being under the tremendous temptations offered by this great shop.

"It is a base plot," she cried, when Bourdoucle and Jouve entered, "these laces have been secreted upon my person. I swear this before God!"

She was weeping tears of rage and now sank into a chair suffocating in her unfastened dress.

Bourdoucle sent the women away, and then said in his usual calm voice:

"We should like Madame to stifle this unfortunate affair out of regard to your family. But in the first place you must sign a letter beginning in these terms: 'I have stolen lace from the *Bonheur des Dames*.' You must give the price of the lace and the date of the occurrence. Afterwards I will surrender this paper when you bring me two thousand francs for the poor."

She rose in a new revolt. "Never. I will never sign that. I would sooner die."

"You will not die, Madame. But I wish you to understand that I shall send at once for the police."

Then there was a terrible scene. She fairly abused him, and said that it was a base and cowardly act in a man to insult a woman in this way. Her Juno-like beauty, her majestic form were disfigured by her passion. Then she tried a little pathos, and appealed in the name of their mothers, talked of kneeling at their feet, and as they remained unmoved, she turned to the desk suddenly and wrote with a trembling hand. The pen spattered; the words "I have stolen" were scratched nearly through the thin paper. She said over and over again: "You see, sir, I yield to force."

Bourdoucle took the paper and placed it in a drawer, saying as he did so:

"You see that it is not alone, for though these ladies like yourself talked of dying before they signed the paper, they have neglected to claim their billets-doux. This, however, is yours when you claim it. You will decide for yourself if it is worth two thousand francs."

She had fastened her dress, she had regained all her arrogance, now that she had written this paper.

"I can go now, I presume?" she added in a curt tone.

But Bourdoucle was busy with another matter. He had decided to dismiss Deloche; he must be very stupid, continual thefts were occurring at his counter, and his customers were never afraid of him.

Madame de Boves repeated her question, and on receiving an affirmative reply, she gave them a murderous look and in a theatrical tone exclaimed as she slammed the door: "Scoundrels!"

Meanwhile Blanche was just without. Her ignorance of what was going on, the appearance of the two salesmen, Jouve going in and out, all suggested summary proceedings. Visions of the police and of a prison rose before her. But she turned ghastly pale when suddenly Vallegnose appeared before her, her husband of a month; he questioned her, and was astonished at the difficulty he experienced in eliciting an answer.

"Where is your mother? What is the matter? Pray answer me. You frighten me."

She could not think of any plausible reply. In her great distress she answered in a low voice:

"Mamma, mamma has stolen—"

"What! stolen?" At last he understood. His wife's pale face and tearful eyes were explained.

"Lace," she stammered, "lace, hidden in her sleeve."

"Did you see her then? Were you looking at her?" he murmured, frozen with the idea that she was an accomplice.

They could say no more, for persons hearing their voices were turning their heads.

A strange hesitation kept Vallegnose motionless for a moment.

What should he do? He had decided to enter Bourdoucle's room, when at that moment he saw Mouret in the distance. He ordered his wife to wait for him there, and going to his old comrade seized his arm and told him in a few short phrases what had taken place.

Mouret at once took him to his private room and tranquillized him as to possible consequences. He assured him that it was not necessary for him to interfere and explained how such matters were commonly arranged. At the same time he did not appear to be much moved by this theft, it was as if he had long suspected it.

But Vallegnose, when relieved of the fear of an immediate arrest, could not accept this affair with the same beautiful resignation. He had thrown himself into a deep chair, and now that he could reason he burst into lamentations on his own account. Was it possible? Could it be that he had entered a family of thieves? It was a marriage in which he had had little heart from the beginning. Mouret recalled his former pessimism, and was surprised at the young man showing such violent emotion. Had he not heard him maintain a hundred times, the nothingness of life, its dullness and vacuity?

For a few minutes therefore, Mouret amused himself by preaching indifference in a tone of amicable pleasantry. But to his great surprise Vallegnose suddenly lost his temper; all his early education, and the pri

ciples inculcated from childhood burst out in accusations against his mother-in-law. As soon as the smallest thing occurred to bring him in contact with human woe and the crimes of humanity at which theoretically he sneered so bitterly, his fine composure vanished.

And now that the honor of his name and race were to be dragged through the mill, the world seemed to be crumbling to pieces.

"Come, calm yourself," concluded Mouret, really pitying the poor fellow. "I will say no more, since my words seem to bring you no consolation at this moment. But it strikes me, it would be wise if you should now go to Madame de Boves, and give her your arm rather than make a scandal. Upon my word, I can't understand how you, who always affect such phlegm, can be now in such a state of despair."

"But it was to the afflictions of others that I was indifferent!" cried Vallegnose, with laughable *naïveté*.

He rose as he spoke, however, and followed the advice of his friend. They both walked back to the door of Bourdoucle's room, just as Madame de Boves came out. She accepted with stateliness the arm of her son-in-law, and as Mouret saluted her with an air of respectful gallantry, he said:

"They have made proper apologies I trust, Madame. These mistakes are very stupid."

Blanche had joined them and now walked slowly behind them.

Mouret watched this trio until they disappeared in the crowd, and then in a meditative mood turned away to cross the shop once more. This scene had momen-

tarily drawn his attention from the contest going on within himself, but now the battle recommenced in his fevered spirit. The theft of this unhappy woman, this last madness in his customers, in some strange way suggested the image of Denise, victorious and haughty with her heel on his brow.

He stopped at the central stair and looked down on the great crush of women below.

The clock was on the point of striking six, it was growing dark within and the electric lamps were being lighted one by one, their opaque globes looking like round moons.

Presently came a murmur of delight from the crowd as the whole floor became one blaze of light, the masses of white displayed on all sides seemed to emit light and brilliancy, the laces floated like cobwebs in the air, and the curtains and coverlids looked like triumphal banners, displayed in honor of the wedding of some queen.

And Mouret continued to gaze down on his kingdom of women; the crowd was beginning to decrease, they were going away with their mad thirst for expenditure in some degree assuaged.

Mouret felt that these people belonged to him, that he had conquered them and held them at his mercy by reason of his incessant exhibition of novelties, by the wonderful bargains he offered, and the system he had inaugurated of allowing goods to be exchanged.

He had conquered even the mothers, and reigned over them all with the brutality of a despot, whose caprices ruined the happiness of many homes. He had

established a new religion, his bazar had taken the place of churches, and many a vapid soul had acquired a new object of interest in life. Women came to the *Bonheur* to pass their unoccupied hours, hours which many of them had hitherto spent in churches. Had he closed his doors a mob would have gathered on the sidewalk and clamored for entrance. Their love of luxury had increased since the *Bonheur*, which for ten years had ministered to it, had been opened.

Madame Marly and her daughter were still wandering among the furniture, Madame Bourdelais could not tear herself from the exhibition of articles manufactured in Paris; Madame de Boves, still on the arm of Vallegnose and followed by Blanche, stopped at each counter with her usual air of haughty pride. He suddenly perceived Madame Desforges standing at the glove counter with Madame Guibal. He noticed that she was the only woman who did not wear a bunch of white violets, but he also saw that in spite of her bitterness and jealousy she had been making purchases and he smiled victoriously, as he looked down upon the crowd as upon flocks and herds from which he drew his fortune.

With a mechanical step Mouret walked along the gallery, so absorbed that he allowed himself to be hustled by the crowd. When he raised his head he found himself in one of the new rooms on the *Rue du Dix-Decembre*, and there he stopped and looked out into the street. The yellow light of the setting sun lay full on the white houses opposite, the blue sky was paling and a gentle breeze had risen; the electric

lights of the *Bonheur* looked like stars low down on the horizon at the decline of day.

Stretching toward the Opera House and the Bourse stood a long line of carriages, with an occasional gleam of light on the harnesses or on their varnished sides.

Summoned by a servant in the livery of the *Bonheur*, first one *coupé* and then another would leave this line and drive to the door, to be entered by a fair customer and dash off. This had continued for an hour with an incessant shutting of carriage doors, snapping of whips and rattle of wheels. The *Bonheur* wagons were standing at the side entrance, receiving the innumerable packages, which they were to carry to every quarter of Paris.

Mouret saw all this with vague dreamy eyes, and triumphant as he was in the presence of Paris conquered, and his devoted slaves, he yet felt a sense of dull depression and realized that there was a strength greater than his own; that his will must bend to the caprice of a child on the very day of his conquest. He who had been struggling for months, who had risen that same morning swearing to stifle his passion, now yielded to it as to that vertigo which is felt sometimes on looking down from a great height, and he was happy in having come to a decision, happy in doing what he believed to be an act of madness. He had come to think in this brief moment, that it was the most desirable and the only thing to do.

That evening after the last table, he was in his cabinet as restless as a boy; he could not stay in any one place, he walked from his desk to the door, where he

stood listening to the noises in the shop, where they were struggling to restore order among the goods after the great sales of the day.

At each approaching footstep his heart seemed to stand still, and finally he held his breath to listen, for he heard loud voices growing rapidly louder.

It was the approach of L'Homme, the cashier, with the day's receipts, which were so enormous that he was accompanied by two men, carrying the silver and the copper. They were bending under the weight of enormous bags thrown over their shoulders, while he himself carried the gold and the paper.

With much puffing and blowing he had made his way through the crowd of clerks who eagerly gathered around him with questions. He climbed the stairs with difficulty, and as he crossed a bridge and then up another flight of winding stairs, his progress was greeted from below with enthusiastic cheers.

Mouret opened the door. L'Homme appeared, followed by the two men who were tottering under the burden they bore, and out of breath as the cashier was, he yet had strength to cry :

"One million two hundred and forty-seven francs, ninety-five centimes."

At last the day's receipts had risen to a million, and this was the cipher of which Mouret had so long dreamed. But he made an angry gesture and said impatiently with the air of a man who is disturbed by some intruder :

"A million? Well, put it down."

L'Homme knew that he liked to see on his desk

these bags of money before they were deposited in the safe. This million covered the desk, crushed the papers and tipped over the ink; some of the money, the gold, silver and copper, rolled upon the floor in a steady stream with as pleasant a sound as when it came from the hands of the fair customers.

Just as the cashier was retiring, quite heart-broken at the indifference of Mouret, Bourdoucle appeared, gaily exclaiming:

"We have got it this time! Our longed-for million!"

But seeing the feverish preoccupation of Mouret he understood that it was useless to say any more. His eyes lighted up, and after a brief silence he continued: "You have decided, then? Well, I give my approval."

Mouret turned hastily, and in a terrible voice, which those who knew him recognized as indicating great excitement, exclaimed:

"Come now, my good fellow, you are altogether too well pleased. The fact is, you think I am on my last legs. But you are greatly mistaken, you won't push me over, yet!"

Disconcerted by this rude attack from this man who saw through everything and everybody, Bourdoucle stammered:

"What do you mean? You are jesting of course. You know perfectly well that I have always had the greatest admiration for you."

"You need not take the trouble to lie!" Mouret cried more violently than before.

"Listen to me," he continued. "We were both of

us very stupid in thinking that my marriage could in any way injure my business. Is not marriage the strength and order of life? Yes, my dear fellow, I shall marry her, and I will show you all the door if you have a word to say against it. You, especially, Bourdoucle, will go to the desk like the rest."

He dismissed him with a gesture, and Bourdoucle realized that he was swept away in this great feminine victory.

He turned to leave the room, and met Denise face to face. He bowed low, feeling utterly bewildered.

Denise was very pale. She had just seen Deloche, who had told her of his dismissal, and when she offered to speak in his behalf he shook his head, declaring that it was not worth while, for he was the most unlucky fellow in the world. What was the good of his trying to remain where he would only be a bother to more fortunate people? He persisted in his obstinate refusal to accept any intervention from her—and finally she bade him a friendly adieu with tears in her eyes. After he had gone she said to herself that now it was her turn. In a few minutes she, too, would leave and go far away to shed her tears in solitude.

"You wished to see me," she said, in her usual calm voice, "and anyway I should have come to thank you for all your goodness to me."

She noticed the money bags on the desk, and this display annoyed and wounded her. Above was the portrait of Madame Hédouin, in its gilt frame, looking down on this scene with the same eternal smile on its painted lips.

"You have resolved, then, to leave us?" asked Mouret, whose voice trembled.

"Yes, sir. I must do so."

Then he took her hands, and said with impassioned tenderness—a tenderness that was all the more vehement because of the long coldness he had imposed upon himself:

"And if I were to marry you, Denise, would you go?"

But she withdrew her hands, and in a tone of intense anguish cried:

"Oh! Monsieur Mouret, I beg of you to say no more. Pray make no further difficulties for me! I cannot, oh! I cannot! God is my witness that I am going away only to avoid a great misfortune!"

She continued to defend herself with broken words. Had she not suffered enough from the gossip of the people in the House? Did he wish to look upon her, and have all his employés look upon her as an adventuress? No, she herself would have strength enough to prevent him from committing such an act of folly. He listened to her in an agony of suspense, and repeated passionately:

"But I wish it! I wish it!"

"No—it is impossible. And my brothers? I have sworn never to marry—I cannot expect you to look out for my two boys!"

"But they will be my brothers, too. Say ye Denise."

"No—no—leave me; you are killing me!"

This last obstacle was driving him mad. W

Even at this price she refused him. He still heard the clamor of his three thousand employés as they welcomed his royal fortune. And this idiotic million lay before him—insulting him with bitter sarcasm. He could have thrown it into the street.

"Go then!" he cried, in a voice quivering with pain. "Go to him whom you love. That is the reason—is it not? You told me, I know; you warned me—and I ought not to have tormented you further."

She was silenced by the violence of his despair. Then all at once, with an uncontrollable impulse, she threw herself on his neck, with tears and sobs, stammering:

"Ah! Monsieur Mouret, it is you whom I love!"

A faint shout came up from the lower floor of the *Bonheur*—the last wave of the enthusiasm of the crowd. The portrait of Madame Hédouin still smiled with its painted lips. Mouret was leaning against the desk, on which was piled the money received that day, but he did not see it. He had not released Denise—he pressed her close to his breast, whispering in her ear that she might now go and spend a month at Valognes, which would close the mouth of all the gossips, and that he would, at the expiration of that time, go there and bring her back to Paris as his wife.

THE END.

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